HOME CINEMA Choice

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION



REVIEWS

Philips 903 OLED TV
Samsung Dolby Atmos soundbar
Acer 4K PJ
Dynaudio Music 3 wireless speaker
REL subwoofer

HOLLYWOOD AT HOME

Panasonic 65FZ802 OLED delivers 4K Blu-rays with cinematic class

VOD battle
Can anyone steal Netflix's crown?

DOCTOR ON CALL
The Avengers are reunited in *Infinity War* on 4K BD, p90

PLUS!
SONY AIMS HIGH WITH ZF9 UHD TV

Perfect harmony
5.1.2 Jamo Atmos system rated

FILM & TV
- RAMPAGE 4K
- READY PLAYER ONE
- PREDATOR TRILOGY 4K
- POLICE STORY 1 & 2
- THE CHANGELING

INSIDE 2018-2019 EISA AWARDS ➜ READER'S ROOM ➜ BOWERS & WILKINS ➜ COLLECTING... 'THE ROCK' ➜ TWIN-SCREEN PRO CINEMA ➜ OPINION ➜ MORE!

www.homecinemachoice.com
ISSUE 290 OCTOBER 2018 £4.99
AUS- $13.50 NZ- $14.99 CAN- $17.00
9 771359 627118 10



Perfect Black creates Perfect Colour

LG OLED TV and Dolby Atmos Sound bar – The perfect cinema experience at home.

Perfect Colour | Perfect Black | Alpha 9 Processor | Dolby Atmos® Sound | ThinQ AI TV

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★
OLED55C8 APRIL 2018

"It's an exceptional performer..."



LG OLED TV AI ThinQ®
Discover more: lg.com/uk/lgoled
Model Shown: C8, SK10Y

LG
Life's Good

HOME CINEMA Choice

www.homecinemachoice.com

EDITORIAL TEAM
Editor Mark Craven
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com
Deputy Editor Anton van Beek
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS
Steve May, John Archer, Tekura Maeva, Jon Thompson, Richard Stevenson, Rik Henderson, Steve Withers, Ed Selley, Martin Dew
Photography Mike Prior

ADVERTISING
Advertising Sales Executive
Richard Morris
Mob: 07834 346461
E-mail: richard.morris@homecinemachoice.com

MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS
UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: 0344 243 9023
E-mail: help@hcc.secureorder.co.uk
USA & CANADA:
Toll Free: 001 866 647 9191
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1604 828 748
BACK ISSUES
www.mags-uk.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM
Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
Group Sales Manager Sonia Smart
Subscriptions Manager Kate Hall
Chief Executive Owen Davies

Published by AVTech Media Ltd
Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way
Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF
Tel: 0844 412 2262
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

Distributed in the UK by Marketforce UK Ltd

BACKGROUND WALL IMAGES:
©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM
©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Home Cinema Choice, ISSN 1359-6276, is published monthly with an additional issue in May by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEMEDIA Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is 68GBP (equivalent to approximately 98USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send address changes to Home Cinema Choice, Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicester, LE16 9EF. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!

Subject to availability

Please reserve/deliver my copy of Home Cinema Choice on a regular basis, starting with issue:

Title First name

Surname

Address

.....

.....

Postcode

Telephone number

If you don't want to miss an issue Just ask!

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: October 4, 2018



Welcome



The rapid rise of Netflix never ceases to astound me. The company that began life as a DVD rental outfit has now become a streaming corp so important that it gets its own button on TV remotes, and its own image preset on incoming Sony TVs (see p18). It's hard to imagine the current cultural landscape without it.

But it isn't without its challengers. **Amazon Prime Video is an obvious rival**, and is certainly stealing a march on Netflix with its live sports streaming strategy. New-to-the-UK platforms like FilmStruck Curzon and Rakuten TV are also attempting to carve out their own niches. And with Netflix supposedly considering a price hike for its HDR content, it may be that the appeal of other services to home cinema enthusiasts increases.

I'll always love Blu-ray, though. Even while streaming platforms have obvious benefits and exclusive content, physical remains king. Rather than worry about which streaming service to trial next, I'd rather kick back with my disc collection...

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU









CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer: The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early *HCC* staffer



Jon Thompson: Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



Steve May: *HCC*'s former Ed. is one of the UK's most respected AV journos



Martin Pipe: Technical expert Martin is renown throughout the industry



Richard Stevenson: Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Ed Selley: Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



Vincent Teoh: Professional video calibrator writes about technology and tweaking

FEATURES

In-depth interviews and special reports. Starts... p24

COVER STORY

24 Let's get digital
It's a battle of the VOD platforms as we take a look at seven streaming services

30 'No killing what can't be killed'
As a new film hits cinemas and the originals land on 4K, we celebrate the seemingly unstoppable *Predator* franchise

34 Double delight
There's more than meets the eye to this smart-looking media room

38 All work and no play
Check out a former home office given a cinematic makeover

107 Expert Imaging & Sound Association Awards 2018-2019
Celebrate the best of the best in home entertainment hardware with the winners of this year's EISA Awards



BULLETIN

The place for hot products, trends and technology. Starts... p7

07 Bravia reborn
Sony's latest flagship LCD TV breaks cover

08 Jack of all trades
Marantz unveils feature-packed AV receiver

09 B&W revamps 600 Series
New drivers and cabinet designs on the way

10 A treat for your ears
The Hi-Fi Show Live returns in November

12 Movie theatres think big
Premium Large Format is the future

14 Going solo
Star Wars spin-off *Solo...* comes to 4K Blu-ray

17 Stu Stu Studio...
Dynaudio in-wall speaker range hits the UK

COVER STORY

18 Sony promises a TV masterclass
We head to Broadway to goggle at Sony's showstopping new Master Series TVs

REGULARS

Whether you want our opinions or your own, here's where to look. Starts... p73

73 Digital Copy
With film critics, some things never change

74 Film Fanatic
Why do so many killer shark flicks lack bite?

76 In the Mix
Dumbing down the Oscars is a bad idea

80 Feedback
Share your thoughts with other AV addicts

86 Certified: AV-Holic
Another *HCC* reader shows off their system

122 AV Avenger
Do ScreenX cinemas have the X factor?

COMPETITIONS

85 Great Blu-rays to be won!
ITV Classic Movies Steelbooks, *Narcos: Season Three*, *Police Story 1 & 2* and *Death Line*!

SUBSCRIBE! Sign up to the world's best AV magazine to save money and never miss an issue **p22**



42
'Perhaps the most home cinema-friendly OLED TV released to date'











REVIEWS

With a focus on performance, these are in-depth tests you can trust... p41

COVER STORY
42 Panasonic TX-65FZ802
Bring Hollywood into your home with this 65in Ultra HD OLED display

46 Arcam AVR390
Step-down AV receiver offers premium performance at a more affordable price

COVER STORY
50 Jamo S Series 5.1.2
Attractive and inexpensive loudspeaker array with Dolby Atmos integration

54 Samsung HW-N950
Second-gen Atmos soundbar brings DTS:X processing to the object-based audio party

58 Philips 65OLED903
65in Ambilight OLED TV impresses with its 4K imagery and built-in B&W soundbar

62 Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player
Custom install streaming hardware with an unusual talent...



64 Acer V6820i
4K DLP projector with Amazon Alexa voice control and a budget price tag

66 Dynaudio Music 3
Danish brand goes portable with its premium wireless speaker

68 REL HT/1205
This powerful 12in sealed cabinet subwoofer won't break the bank

70 Lithe Audio LWF1
In-ceiling speaker cuts the cable in favour of a wireless connection

70 Deezer
Streaming music platform that wants you to go with the 'Flow'

PLAYBACK



The latest Blu-rays, DVDs and videogames reviewed and rated. Starts... p89

90 Avengers: Infinity War – Cinematic Universe Edition [4K]
91 Isle of Dogs; Deep Blue Sea 2; Terminal; Unsane
92 Ready Player One [4K]
94 F1 2018; Tomb Raider [4K]; Darkest Hour [4K]; The X Files: Season 11
95 Rampage [4K]
96 Rick and Morty: Season 3
Poldark: Complete Series Four
How to Talk to Girls at Parties
Black Book
Suffering of Ninko
98 Predator: 3-Movie Collection [4K]
99 The Changeling: Limited Edition; Amazonia: The Catherine Miles Story; Hatchet 4: Victor Crowley; Hansel and Gretel; The Case of the Scorpion's Tale
100 Jackie Chan's Police Story 1 & 2
101 La Belle et la Bête; Tideland; Dead Ringers; Sex, Lies, and Videotape
102 S.W.A.T.: Season One; Extinction

104 *COLLECTING... DWAYNE JOHNSON*
We round up 10 of The Rock's best films. How many are in your disc collection?

The Worlds Finest Filmmakers use M&K to Make their Movies
Does Your Cinema Deserve Anything Less?



"Best Home Cinema Speakers 2017"

M&K Sound S300 THX Series

"This system is superb and is composed of The Best Home Cinema Speakers of the year."
Phil Hinton, avforums

* Warner Bros
* 20th Century Fox
* Universal
* Paramount
* Dreamworks
* HBO
* Skywalker Sound
* Disney
* THX
* DTS
* Dolby Labs
* Sony Music
* Lucas Film

M&K SOUND®
www.mksound.com

For more information please contact our exclusive distributor in the UK, Gecko Inc Ltd, phone 0845 262 2882

The Choice of Professionals®

BULLETIN

➜**NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** **MARANTZ** Feature-packed nine-channel SR6013 receiver **DYNAUDIO** Custom Studio range takes Danish brand in-wall **GOING LARGE** Cinema industry embraces new tech **AT THE 'PLEX** This month's cinema releases **NEWS X10** The hottest stories in bite-sized chunks **SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY** Sci-fi saga spins-off in 4K HDR **& MORE!**

Bravia reborn

Sony ZF9 ➜ www.sony.co.uk



Available later this year in 65in and 75in iterations (prices TBC), Sony's new ZF9 TV will assume flagship status in the brand's LCD lineup. Its 4K HDR capabilities include Dolby Vision playback, with image quality honed by a full-array LED backlight with X-Tended Dynamic Range PRO local dimming; new X1 Ultimate processor; and dedicated Netflix picture preset. Additional goodies are YouView integration, Google Assistant and Alexa support, and discreet cable management. See p18 for more.

HCC ONLINE...

For breaking AV news, blogs, features and reviews visit **www.homecinemachoice.com**
Follow us on Twitter **@hccmag**
Like us on Facebook
facebook.com/homecinemachoice

Jack of all trades

Marantz SR6013 → www.marantz.com

Rustle up £1,250 for Marantz's SR6013 and you'll get an AV receiver that's bursting with features. An Atmos/DTS:X model rated at 9 x 185W (with 11.2-channel processing), it adds HEOS multiroom and Spotify, Tidal and Deezer hookup to Bluetooth/network/AirPlay streaming. Hi-res file support ranges to 5.6MHz DSD, all of its eight HDMI inputs (and three outputs) are 4K HDR capable, and there's an MM phono stage for vinyl junkies. As usual with the brand, auto EQ comes via Audyssey – in this case the premium MultEQ XT32 suite.



Alexa gets plugged in



The Ellipsis from Brit brand i-box aims to bring Amazon's Alexa smart assistant to all areas of your house by combining speaker and plug into a single discreet unit – the idea being you can locate it in a wall socket on your landing and still bark commands at Alexa as you head upstairs to bed. Up to eight can be used in a multiroom configuration, and i-box claims the £60 gadget outperforms the Echo Dot in the sonic stakes, despite being small enough not to block any neighbouring sockets.
www.iboxstyle.com

TCL targets 4K mass market



Chinese telly giant TCL is bringing its wide colour DP648 4K TV range to the UK, in 43in, 50in, 55in and 65in sizes. The models support HDR10 and HDR10+ playback, with Brightness Plus and UHD Micro Dimming tools to enhance contrast, and SDR-to-HDR conversion. Netflix, YouTube and Rakuten apps are joined by catchup TV delivered via Freeview Play. Pricing ranges from £400 for the 43in set to £900 for the 65-incher – all models feature an 'ultra-thin' metal chassis.
www.tcl.eu

B&W revamps 600 Series

New drivers and cabinet design, but don't look for an Atmos module

Bowers & Wilkins has announced a major upgrade to its 600 Series loudspeaker range, which, amongst other things, replaces the models' iconic yellow Kevlar drivers with Continuum cones trickled down from the brand's top-tier 800 Series.

The 600 Series, a B&W best-seller for nearly 20 years (with over one million units sold) was last revised in 2014. That shake-up saw the introduction of the Decoupled Double Dome tweeter, and dual-layer aluminium bass drivers on its three-way boxes. The new range is a more fundamental rethink, and comes one year after the brand similarly refreshed its 700 Series lineup.

Cosmetically, the new 600 speakers have a cleaner, modernist styling. Black-ash vinyl wrap has been replaced with a more fashionable lightly textured black finish, and B&W has junked basic grille pegs, opting for magnetic grilles. All ports have been relocated from the front of the speakers to the rear.

The lineup features two standmounts – the 607 (£400-per-pair) features a 5in Continuum midbass driver, while the £550-per-pair 606 uses a larger 6in unit. Stepping up the range, there's the 603 (£1,250p/p), a three-way floorstander using two 6in paper-cone bass drivers, and a Continuum cone midrange. A new HTM6 centre speaker (£400) replaces the old HTM62 S2 and HTM61 S2, and is sonically matched to the 603. All models use an updated Decoupled Double Dome tweeter, with a claimed HF extension to 38kHz.

For those planning a 600 Series multichannel setup, the company suggests a pair of 603s plus the HTM6 centre to create the front soundstage, with 607 speakers for surrounds. Then there's a choice of three subwoofers: the 8in ASW608, 10in ASW610, and beefier 10in ASW610XP, priced at £400, £500 and £800 respectively.



The 603 features paper-cone LF drivers



Andy Kerr: 'We don't believe in Dolby Atmos modules. If you're going to do Atmos, we'd rather you use an in-ceiling speaker'

Wot, no Atmos?

What you won't see in the 600 Series stable is any concession to Dolby Atmos-enabled speakers. And according to Andy Kerr, B&W's Director of Product Communication, there are no plans to offer them.

'We don't believe in Dolby Atmos modules,' he told *HCC*. 'If you're going to do Dolby Atmos, we would rather you use an in-ceiling speaker.'

Kerr insists that Atmos modules compromise the wider musical performance of a system. 'When a Dolby Atmos module is placed on top of another loudspeaker, it subtly extends the height of the baffle – even if it's a relatively small module. We spent an awful lot of time trying to get the tweeter to the top of the baffle, or as near as we possibly can, as we believe this helps the dispersion characteristics. So extending the height of the baffle is counterintuitive from a stereo performance point of view.

'We're a Dolby partner, we've been to all the briefings and have the spec. We built one, but we didn't like what happened. If the by-product is not working particularly well, and doing a little bit of harm to your stereo performance, then we'd rather not make them.'

Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

GLOW: Season Two (Netflix)



Not only is this women's wrestling dramedy one of the VOD platform's best original shows, thanks to its superb 4K HDR imagery it's one of the best-looking, too.

The Endless (Region B BD)



There's so much to unpack in this Lovecraftian horror that we keep getting drawn back for another look at Arrow's superb release.

Beast (All-region BD)



This deft psychological thriller may mine the darkest parts of the soul, but it also conjures up some truly stunning visuals on Blu-ray.

Community: Seasons 1-6 (All 4)



Don't expect us to get any work done now we can stream all six seasons of this cult US sitcom.

Bachelor Party (Region B BD)



Remember when Tom Hanks was funny? See him at his best with this long-overdue UK platter.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick? Catch these this month

The Nun



September 07: Following in the footsteps of the demonic dolly Annabelle, *The Nun* sees yet another supernatural nasty from the *Conjuring* films get its own spin-off. Corin Hardy, who helmed the atmospheric 2015 creature-feature *The Hallow*, directs.

The Predator

September 12: Shane Black graduates from a supporting role in the original *Predator* to directing and co-writing this fourth film in the sci-fi/action franchise. Turn to p28 to hunt down more on the new film and its predecessors.

Mile 22



September 19: Mark Wahlberg reunites once more with director Peter Berg (*Lone Survivor*, *Deepwater Horizon*) for an action thriller about a CIA task force escorting an 'asset' to an extraction point.

A treat for your ears

Hi-Fi Show Live lines up world's finest hardware this November

Advance tickets for the 2018 Hi-Fi Show Live are on sale and *HCC* subscribers can snaffle money off single-day or weekend passes.

Organised by our sister magazine *Hi-Fi News & Record Review*, the Hi-Fi Show Live showcases the world's finest, high-end two-channel hardware, with a focus on in-depth demonstrations and presentations from designers and engineers.

The show, now in its sixth year, takes place at the Beaumont Estate in Old Windsor over the weekend of November 10-11. Attending brands include AKG, Audeze, Bowers & Wilkins, Chord Electronics, D'Agostino Master Systems, DALI, GoldenEar, JBL, Krell, Mark Levinson, MartinLogan, Primare, Rotel, Tannoy, Wilson Audio and many more.





The show is held at the Beaumont Estate in Old Windsor

Music maestros

As a dedicated hi-fi show, Dolby Atmos setups will naturally be in short supply. Yet home cinema fans with a passion for music, those looking to add a little vinyl to their Blu-ray diet, or anyone just keen to hear some ear-bending stereo systems, will find a lot to enjoy.

Confirmed products include ELAC's new Vela loudspeaker range demo'd by distributor The Hi-Fi Network, and Kalista's sci-fi-styled, super high-end DreamPlay One CD player. Technics' flagship SL-1000R direct-drive turntable will showcase the vinyl revolution, alongside interactive demos of headphones and headphone amps, and hi-res/networked audio systems.

Ticket prices are £20 for a day or a two-day pass for £30, but *HCC* subscribers can secure their day entry for £15, or £25 for the weekend, while tickets last.

Further info is available at www.hifinews.co.uk/show.



The Hi-Fi Show Live has a high-end focus...

Budget 'bar is well connected

Hitachi unveils 2.1-channel TV sound booster with a tempting price tag

Illustrating the increasing value to be found in the entry-level soundbar market, Hitachi's new AXS460BTU delivers subwoofer-assisted stereo audio, plus two-in, one-out HDMI switching, for £150.

Claiming to offer the 'best value sound – bar none', it is on sale now, exclusively through Argos.

Hitachi's 'bar stands 54mm high and measures just short of a metre wide, which should make it an easy fit in a second-room setup, and features dual 25W amplification for its L/R channels.

The accompanying subwoofer uses a 65W (RMS) power plant, and connects wirelessly.

In addition to its HDMI connectivity, the soundbar offers coaxial and optical digital audio inputs, plus stereo phono and 3.5mm ports.

Bluetooth (with NFC connection) is on-hand for simplified music streaming, and the 'bar features Dolby and DTS bitstream decoding.

www.hitachidigitalmedia.com



The AXS460BTU features HDMI and Bluetooth connections



The Q Series hi-fi speakers
KEF's Q Series has been judged the best Home Theatre Speaker System 2018-2019 by EISA. The legendarily picky judges were blown away by the Q Series' ability to deliver an incredibly immersive wrap-around sound stage, the precision of the latest iteration of the Uni-Q driver array when it comes to crystal clear treble and midrange information, and the depth and clarity of the bass. When combined with stylish, well-crafted cabinets and the Dolby Atmos-enabled Q50a up-firing speaker and a dedicated centre channel the judges concluded the Q Series offered "Unbeatable Home Cinema Sound".

EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM
KEF Q Series

KEF

KEF.COM

OBSESSED WITH HIGH RESOLUTION

Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

Marvel Designer Wall Panels



Give your movie den a Marvel makeover with these retro wall panels from EXKLUSiV Flooring. Featuring historic covers and interior art from some of Marvel's most iconic comics, the 50cm x 50cm high-gloss modular panels will set you back £50 for a pack of two (with fittings). Head to www.exklusivflooring.com for more on the company's officially-licenced wall panels and flooring.

Selling the Movie: The Art of the Film Poster



Author Ian Hayden Smith takes a welcome look at the history of the movie poster in this lavishly illustrated £25 hardback. Going decade by decade, he explores how the poster developed, with additional focus given to specific genres, themes, designers and filmmakers. The result is a beautifully presented, incredibly informative tome that deserves a place in every film fan's library.

Quarter Arcades Pac-Man



Ever wanted a Pac-Man arcade machine of your own, but didn't have the space? Then check out this fully functioning quarter-scale (430mm tall) cabinet from Numbskull Designs. The Quarter Arcade Pac-Man cabinet is available for pre-order (at www.numbskull.co.uk), priced £150.

Movie theatres think big

Cinema industry expo shows premium large format is the way forward

CineEurope, the professional cinema convention held each year in Barcelona, is where exhibitors, suppliers, distributors and studios get together for a week of deal-cutting and mutual back-slapping. But, discovered *HCC*, it's also great for spotting emerging technology that's destined to end up in your local multiplex.

Just like its Film Expo Group counterparts CinemaCon and CineAsia, CineEurope presents a chance for the studios to promote their upcoming movie slates, for hardware and software companies to sell new products to cinema chains, and for industry leaders to convene for seminars. It treats attendees to stage appearances from A-list actors/directors, plus preview screenings, but its focus is pure business, which in 2018 means new schemes to lure punters away from their Netflix boxsets, and even our beloved home cinemas. The most obvious of which is the drive towards bigger, more immersive experiences.

The PLF battle

News of the expansion of premium large format (PLF) screens in Europe and beyond dominated the expo chatter. In the run-up to the show, Dolby entered into an agreement with the Odeon Cinema Group to deploy seven Dolby Cinema sites at as-yet undisclosed locations in the UK 'over the next several years' – considered a breakthrough as the infrastructure in UK cities doesn't easily lend to expensive retro-fits. IMAX quickly followed suit with an announcement of 26 new IMAX Laser theatres across Europe and the US (in Regal and Cineworld chains), taking the total to 55 – all will also receive seating, branding and audio enhancements (to its 12-channel system). But at CineEurope, Korea's CJ Group (of 4DX fame) showcased something even more eye-opening. Dubbed ScreenX, it uses a three-wall projection design to create a 270-degree viewing experience, described as 'panoramic.' It has already gained a foothold in South Korea, and is now appearing at select UK theatres – see p122 for more.

CinemaNext, a division of Parisian company Ymagis Group, has a different take on the PLF revolution, known as Sphera. Here, a side-wall LED show can colour-sync with pre-show entertainment – a bit like a super-size version of Ambilight. Each auditorium will also flaunt CinemaNext's HDR system known as EclairColor.

Challenging traditional projection is Samsung's cinematic LED display technology, which was branded Onyx at CineEurope, and incorporates JBL's Sculpted Surround audio system, to literally bounce sound off the screen and towards the audience, ostensibly solving lack-of-behind-screen-speaker issues. And even though Steven Spielberg and Christopher Nolan have expressed their reservations about 'big televisions', Sony is still planning to introduce its Crystal LED system into cinemas before the end of the year, while NEC, Barco and Christie are working on their own versions. The upside for cinema owners using LED solutions is they save on building a projector booth, freeing up space for another three or four rows of seats.

Away from visual innovations, Finnish entrepreneur Flexound was at CineEurope to show off an in-seat multi-sensory sound solution that doesn't require separate software to produce effects, as is the case of interactive seats from D-BOX and others. An EVE (Elastic Vibrating Element) at each seat can reproduce a 15Hz-20kHz frequency range, doubling down on the external 7.1 or immersive audio system installed in the theatre. Meanwhile, in-seat passive stereo speakers produce audio in time alignment with the cinema processor, and deep bass can be replicated through vibration rather than cranked up subs. This solution presents an economical proposition for operators of premium cinemas, and created quite a buzz...





Cinema innovations: Flexound (above) and Sphera

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



News x10

1 And the winner is...

The 2018 CEDIA Awards will be announced on September 27 at a lavish bash at the British Museum. So it's 'good luck' to the install companies from the UK and beyond hoping to scoop prizes in categories including Best Home Cinema and Best Media Room – and, as usual, look out for a roundup in *HCC* later in the year.

2 Virgin prices

Virgin Media is upping its prices this Autumn, with customers looking at an increase of £2 to £4 a month, depending on the services they subscribe to. Virgin has been at pains to point out, however, that the price rises are in no way related to the agreement it recently reached with UKTV to restore its channels.

3 BD needs more room

Fresh research from consumer insight organisation Kantar Worldpanel claims that 'impulse' purchases of music and video physical media (CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays, in other words) have fallen over the last year, and lays the blame at reductions in retail floorspace on the UK high street.

4 Happy Halloween!

Boutique Blu-ray label Eureka has taken the wraps off its October releases. Leading the charge on October 8 are a trio of cult horror titles – *Night of the Creeps*, *Monkey Shines* and *Troll: The Complete Collection* (featuring *Troll*, *Troll 2* and the *Best Worst Movie* documentary). A Blu-ray double-pack of Jackie Chan's fan-favourite period action smashes *Project A* and *Project A: Part II* will follow on October 22.

5 Dirac Live update goes beta

Dirac Research has launched a revamped beta version of its Dirac Live room correction solution for owners of Arcam, Lexicon, Audio Control and NAD kit. A more intuitive user interface, an enhanced phase correction algorithm for stereo reproduction and better customisation are some of the tweaks promised by the updated platform. Visit www.dirac.com/diraclivebeta for more info.

6 Popularity contest

After scoring its lowest ever viewing figures earlier this year, the Academy Awards are hoping to win back goggleboxers with the introduction of an Oscar celebrating 'outstanding achievement in popular film.' While precise details on the new category have yet to be revealed, it seems this could give the sort of popular blockbusters the Academy usually ignores the chance to grab a gong.

7 *Imagine* reimagined

A restored version of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1972 music film *Imagine* is coming to selected cinemas on September 17. As well as including 'cinema-exclusive' footage of John and his band performing two additional songs, the restored film boasts an Atmos remix that promises to 'put you in the studio while the band play live.'

8 Roku's ready to rumble

UFC rival Karate Combat has launched its own free (ad-supported) channel on the Roku platform in the UK, Ireland, US and most of Latin America. Roku users will have access to all of Karate Combat's fights from around the world, including live streamed events.

9 Victorian IMAX

One of the unexpected highlights of this year's London Film Festival looks set to be *The Great Victorian Moving Picture Show*. Taking place on October 17, this one-off archive gala will be screening surviving 68mm fragments from some of Britain's earliest films (1897-1901) on the nation's biggest screen at the BFI IMAX.

10 A *Night...* to remember

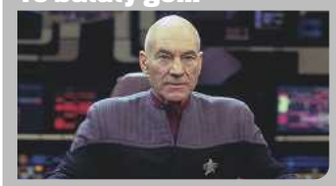
Indicator is giving fright fans a treat this Halloween with its long-awaited Blu-ray release of Jacques Tourneur's classic 1957 shocker *Night of the Demon*. Arriving on October 22, the limited edition two-disc set packs four(!) versions of the film, plus a host of extras including a commentary, a 1947 radio adaptation of M.R. James' original story, and the *Speak of the Devil: The Making of Night of the Demon* documentary.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

To baldly go...



Patrick Stewart is returning to the world of *Star Trek*. The actor has signed on to head up a new series for CBS's All Access VOD platform in the US, which will follow on from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and tell the next chapter in Captain Jean-Luc Picard's life. According to reports, the platform is developing a number of other new *Star Trek* series as well.

I'd buy that for a dollar

Neill Blomkamp has moved on from wanting to direct a new *Alien* flick and is lined up to helm *RoboCop Returns* instead, based on a script from the writers of the 1987 original. He's teased getting Peter Weller back in the tin-man costume, too.

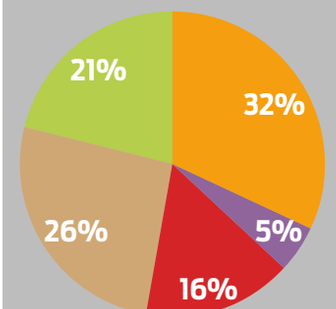
A Rose for Batwoman

Ruby '*The Meg*' Rose has landed the role of Batwoman for US network The CW. The lesbian crimefighter will make her smallscreen debut in this year's *Arrow-Flash-Supergirl* crossover, before being expected to land a series of her own in 2019.

We asked...

Which of these films are you most looking forward to this Xmas?

- *Alita: Battle Angel*
- *Bumblebee*
- *Mary Poppins Returns*
- *Aquaman*
- None – I wanted *Star Wars*!



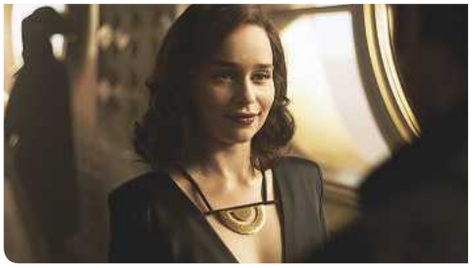
Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Going solo

Solo: A Star Wars Story → Walt Disney → DVD/Blu-ray/3D Blu-ray/Ultra HD Blu-ray

Find out how Han first met Chewie and got his hands on the Millennium Falcon when the spectacular *Star Wars* spin-off *Solo: A Star Wars Story* makes its UK disc debut on September 24. Extra features on the HD releases will include nine behind-the-scenes featurettes and eight deleted scenes. As with *The Last Jedi*, the 4K version of *Solo...* receives an audio upgrade from DTS-HD MA 7.1 to Dolby Atmos – however, unlike that earlier release, Disney is reserving Dolby Vision grading for 'digital' platforms.







SOUND R|EVOLUTION

SVS

HOME THEATRE SUBWOOFER OF THE YEAR!

See us at THE hi-fi SHOW Live
10-11 November
#HiFiShowLive



"When it comes to a bass performance you can feel as well as hear, the SB-4000 is in a class of its own. Offering maximum SPL, massive slam and an incredible low-frequency extension, this sub will shake, rattle and roll your home theatre."

EISA AWARD
Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE SUBWOOFER
SVS SB-4000

karma
audio-visual

01423 358 846 karma-av.co.uk

Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the *HCC* Facebook page

What's your favourite Steven Spielberg film?



Too easy – *Schindler's List*.
Deji Ayeni

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial.
Mark Perry

1941.
Jamie Biesemans

Got to be *Jaws*.
Fill Humpage

Love most of his films TBH. But *Jaws* will always have a special place in my heart. What a film...
Jeff Baker

What you're watching on your home cinema...



Grease in 4K. Very impressive picture and sound for a remaster.
Craig Hillier

Ready Player One. The Dolby Atmos is amazing.
Nins Narinder Singh Deol

Finished watching *Manhunt: Unabomber* – a very well made and involving Netflix series.
Ronnie Montgomery

Terminator 2 3D.
Paul Lynch

Avengers Infinity War.
Laura McCurdy McLeod



Unbreakable on BD ready for *Glass*, and *Plunkett & Macleane* on BD – a DNR disaster, but I love the film!
Mike Wadkins

Three Billboards... great movie.
Barry Kyle

Winchester at home and went to see *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*.
Dirk de Sagher

Back to the Future on Blu-ray.
Seán O'Brien

Join in the fun

Like our page at facebook.com/HomeCinemaChoice

Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



Diamond geezers...

The real-life Hatton Garden heist, masterminded by a gang of retirement-age robbers, is given what appears to be a comedic retelling in this incoming Brit flick starring Michael Caine, Michael Gambon and Ray Winstone. Sample dialogue: 'It's the blind leading the deaf...' In cinemas this month.
youtu.be/AkQHNgeg--Q



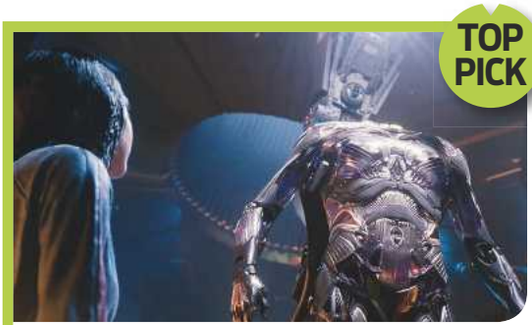
...AVR Deezers

Recent firmware for Onkyo and Pioneer AVRs (plus other hardware) has added support for Deezer, the subscription-based music streaming service – including the top-tier Deezer Hi-Fi option, which enables 44.1kHz/16-bit FLAC delivery of some 35m+ tracks. See the brands' websites for full kit lists.
uk.onkyo.com / pioneer-audiovisual.eu/uk



The Strike Team returns

Fans of the superb US police drama *The Shield* will be thrilled to learn it will finally make its Blu-ray debut (in an 18-disc set comprising all seven seasons plus new and archival extras) on November 6. Note, though, that it's currently only a US release, and the price is an almost-criminal $230...
amzn.to/2MxLa0T



Let battle commence

Alita: Battle Angel, the long-in-gestation manga adaptation from James Cameron and Robert Rodriguez, lands in cinemas in December. From this trailer, it seems much of the film's rumoured $200m budget has been lavished on SFX. Could this be a new 3D showcase?
youtu.be/w7pYhpJaJW8



Festive spirit

Bradford's Science+Media Museum hosts its annual Widescreen Weekend from October 11-14. Screenings include 70mm prints of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Year of the Dragon* and – surprisingly – *Flatliners*, in addition to a Cinerama showcase and seminars and film intros from special guests. Tickets on sale now.
scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk



Festive spirit II

Also in October (10-21) is the BFI London Film Festival, which brings world premieres (including the new Laurel and Hardy biopic *Stan and Laurie*), cult classics and indie gems to cinemas across the capital – plus numerous events, competitions and red carpet glamour.
https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/lff/Online/

Stu Stu Studio...

Dynaudio Custom Studio → www.dynaudio.com/custom

Dynaudio, in partnership with Custom AV Distribution, is bringing its range of in-wall and in-ceiling cinema speakers to the UK. Offering both 6.5in and 8.5in midbass versions, the Custom Studio speakers all feature Dynaudio's traditional soft-dome, neodymium magnet tweeters, tool-free mounting systems and paintable magnetic grilles. The full lineup includes a twin-tweeter stereo model, and modular LCR speakers where separate bass and mid/tweeter units allow for a flexible installation. Pricing starts at around £700 for the two-way S4-W65.



Sony's new OLED and LED LCD displays are being hailed by the brand as a milestone in TV technology. Does **Steve May** agree?



Sony promises a TV masterclass

NEW YORK'S BROADWAY has seen its fair share of great shows. *La Cage aux Folles*, *Cats*, *Chicago*, *The Book of Mormon*...

But few, I'll wager, put on a performance as spectacular as Sony's Master Series debut. At Sony Hall, located in the heart of New York's Theater District, the Japanese major made a right old song and dance about two flatscreens which it declared milestones in the history of picture quality (well, it's New York: a little bit of hyperbole was to be expected).

Aided and abetted by a guest appearance of the *Lost in Space* robot (2018 version), the TV maker ushered in a second-generation OLED flagship, the AF9, and the long-awaited replacement to its lauded ZD9 LED LCD screen, the ZF9.

Both, we were told, would be the torchbearers for Sony's premium TV line. And it's easy to see why. Up close and personal, they looked rather special.

At the time of writing, Sony hadn't confirmed pricing, but we can confirm that the AF9 will be available in 55in (KD-55AF9) and 65in (KD-65AF9) screen sizes, while the ZF9 will ship in 65in (KD-65ZF9) and 75in (KD-75ZF9) iterations.

Ultimate image quality?

So what makes these two screens so interesting? Foremost, they're the first to utilise Sony's X1



For its new range-topping displays, Sony has introduced 'Master Series' branding

Ultimate image processor. Teased at CES in January, this deep-science silicon hopes to deliver a considerable escalation in picture tweaking stakes. With advances in 4K panel technology increasingly difficult to achieve, powerhouse image processors like these are now seen as the best way to wring more performance out of pixels.

The X1 Ultimate introduces a new intelligent image processing mode – Object-Based Super Resolution – and updates Sony's Object-Based HDR Remaster engine; by enhancing individual objects within a picture, images take on almost tangible levels of detail and depth. This pimped chip also powers a new Pixel Control booster, designed to improve colour and contrast.

There are other embellishments too, particularly on the AF9 TV. This new OLED features a revised version of Sony's Acoustic Surface audio technology, which is now named Acoustic Surface+...

Sounds crazy

Acoustic Surface technology, as you'll probably know, does away with conventional loudspeaker drivers and uses actuators which vibrate the OLED panel itself. Sounds crazy, but it works well. For the AF9, a centre channel actuator and a second subwoofer have been added, effectively creating a 3.2-channel sound system.

All three actuators (now housed in aluminium baskets to increase rigidity and improve dynamics) are incorporated into the kickback stand, rather than standing apart as they did on the older A1. This gives the set a rather more streamlined appearance.

To show the potential of this upgrade, I was treated to some show tunes (appropriately), courtesy of *The Greatest Showman*. It quickly became clear that Acoustic Surface Audio+ represents a significant step up. There's more clearly defined sonic movement around the screen, with vocals locked dead centre.

The new system even offers a mode where the panel functions as a flatscreen centre channel, letting it be used within a multispeaker home cinema setup.

While impressive, my advice would be to treat this centre channel bonus with caution. The line input mode aggregates the set's various amplifier modules together, re-amplifying the input signal. Sony quotes a cumulative 98W for the set, but it remains to be seen if the AF9 could keep pace with a separate home cinema sound system when it's running at reference level.

There are also going to be clear tonal differences between standalone left/right speakers and the TV as centre. Those acoustic actuators are a little on the sharp side when compared with conventional drivers.

The AF9 OLED has the same lean-back design first seen on the A1, but changes to its kickstand mean it doesn't recline quite so casually. Not everyone dug that original laid-back look, so maybe this compromise will more readily convince buyers.

Sony has also tinkered with its image presets. The old Cinema Pro mode has been replaced by a new version of Custom, which comes with Reference settings that emulate Sony's Pro OLED mastering monitor, the BVM-X300. The catch, of course, is that few viewers will watch TV with the same lighting conditions of a dimmed-down mastering suite, and even then they may consider the settings too dark.

Both the AF9 and ZF9 models also feature a novel Netflix Calibrated Mode image preset. Sony made much ado about 'reflecting the creator's intent' with its new models (following in the steps of Panasonic – see p42), shooting them out against that Pro OLED screen.

While the Netflix Calibrated Mode is intriguing, its value remains unclear. Sony brought along Zack Estrin, showrunner on the platform's *Lost in Space* show, to endorse the mode, which sets out to replicate the characteristic of a Netflix mastering monitor. Estrin was impressed, but I was left with more questions than answers.

As far as I could gather, this Netflix preset is not driven by metadata in individual programme streams, instead being a concoction of generic settings. And given just how disparate much of the material available on Netflix is, some might say this sounds more like marketing hoodoo than innovation.

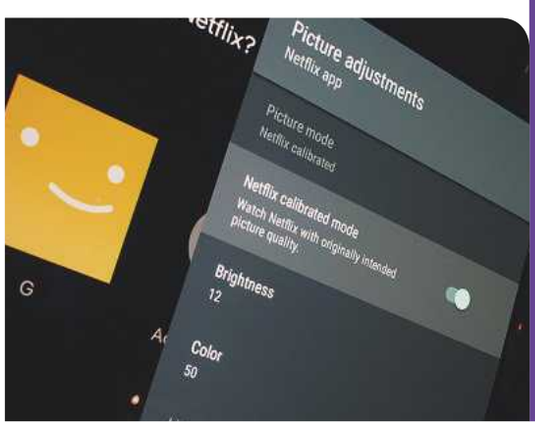
Lip-smacking LCD

The ZF9 LED LCD TV is a rather different beast to the OLED, and it arrives with fewer innovations in tow. But it still left me licking my lips.

Back at CES, Sony previewed a claimed 10,000-nit 8K display that took HDR into areas >



Lost in Space showrunner Zack Estrin talked up Sony's new Netflix Calibrated Mode (far right)







The AF9 OLED again features a lean-back stand design



we've not seen before – and prior to the New York launch, there was some speculation that attendees might witness some of that backlighting technology employed on new sets destined for retail. But that's not the case. The ZF9 is no brighter in practice than the model it replaces, although Sony has successfully made adjustments to improve off-axis viewing.

In fact, the ZF9 appears to use basically the same direct lighting array as the ZD9 range, which debuted in 2016. Company officials remained tight-lipped about specifics, refusing to divulge just how many dimmable zones the new sets feature, and just how bright those HDR peaks can shine.

Yet while Sony may have bailed out of the escalating nit wars, the ZF9 (which, like the AF9, is compatible with HDR10, broadcast HLG and Dolby Vision) is still more than capable of producing dazzling visuals – assorted HDR demonstrations looked sensationally good.

Again, the X1 Ultimate is going to be the big differentiator for the ZF9. Sony ran a number of presentations around Sony Hall to show off its talents, and staged comparisons with key rivals. An early take-away is that if you want an HDR screen that's going to thrill in even brightly lit rooms, this could be the model you've been waiting for.

That said, during one of the previews I did spot something which gave a niggling cause for concern. A demonstration of the ZF9 running a widescreen movie threw up questions about its ability to deliver true black. The set's letterbox bars were clearly a little grey, not a phenomenon I would expect to see on a full array LED display of the calibre of the ZF9.

I'm not going to jump to conclusions – it was quite clear from their New York debut that these Master Series offerings were early samples – but it is something we'll look closer at when review models finally begin to surface.

Design-wise, the ZF9 is a winner. More conventional than its OLED stablemate, it's an easy screen to love. It has a thin aluminium frame, supported by two widely spaced feet, and exudes premium build quality.

Encore please

Ultimately, Sony's Master Series showstopper has left me hungry for more. Both the AF9 and ZF9 look likely to be the best screens we've seen from Sony in the 4K era, and as such they're supreme examples of high-end television. They may even be the milestones that Sony claims. And that's music to my ears ■

Ultra HD Blu-ray range gets new entry point

£200 gets you Sony's latest 4K spinner – complete with SACD playback

In shops now, following an August launch, is Sony's UBP-X500. Those up to speed with the brand's naming system will immediately recognise this as a new base model, ranged below the UBP-X700, X800 and X1000ES. Yet the £200 ticket price still brings some bonus features, notably SACD support and hi-res digital file playback.

Unlike its step-up brethren, however, the UBP-X500 isn't Dolby Vision capable, and doesn't have built-in Wi-Fi. AV inputs are a single HDMI out and USB port. Not overtly cutting-edge, then, but its compact design (it measures around 30cm wide) and low price will no doubt find it fans.

Sony's latest 4K deck arrives with a budget price



SERIOUSLY CINEMA

SYSTEMS PROVIDE THE **BEST PICTURE & SOUND QUALITY** AVAILABLE AT ANY GIVEN BUDGET.

Whether you are looking for the very best sound quality to partner a new TV, a state of the art cinema or a system that will perfectly reproduce live music, our systems will outperform any alternatives.

Using only "best in class" components, our systems deliver better performance more discretely.

Call today and put us to the test.



SeriouslyCinema®

seriouslycinema.co.uk

richard@seriouslycinema.co.uk
07539 935 999 | 01727 422058
Social media search: Seriously Cinema Ltd

Authorised dealers and installers of
Steinway Lyngdorf and MK Sound products

M&K SOUND® STEINWAY LYNGDORF

Great Savings

when you **subscribe** to *Home Cinema Choice* today



13 issues **delivered to your door**
Great savings on the shop price
Download each new issue to your device
A **74% discount** on your Digital subscription
Access your subscription on multiple devices



13 issues **delivered to your door**
Great savings on the shop price
Never miss an issue



DIGITAL-ONLY SUBSCRIPTIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE...

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE
http://hcc.secureorder.co.uk/HCC/HCC1018P

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 4th October 2018. *Discounts may vary dependent on payment method selected. Please see www.homecinemachoice.com/terms for full terms & conditions



SAVE 74% ON DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS*

Offer ends 4th October 2018

IN EVERY ISSUE

Kit reviews, movies and TV, installs, accessories, insight, opinion, competitions + more

CALL OUR ORDER LINE

0344 243 9023 (quote ref HCC1018P)

Lines open Mon - Fri - 8.00am - 8.00pm GMT & Sat - 9.30am - 3.30pm GMT

UK Calls costs 7p per minute plus your phone company's access charge. Overseas calls will cost more

HOME CINEMA Choice SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS *UK ONLY*

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Home Cinema Choice*

☐ *Print + Digital*: £13.25 every 3 months

☐ *Print*: £10.99 every 3 months

YOUR DETAILS *MUST BE COMPLETED*

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....

Address

.....

Postcode Country

Tel Mobile.....

Email D.O.B

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....

Address

.....

Postcode Country

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR BANK/BUILDING SOCIETY

Originator's reference 422562

DIRECT Debit

Name of bank.....

Address of bank.....

.....

..... Postcode

Account holder.....

Signature..... Date

Sort code Account number

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyTimeMedia Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyTimeMedia Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (official use only)

Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

CARD PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to *Home Cinema Choice*, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment

UK ONLY:

☐ *Print + Digital*: £56.00

☐ *Print*: £47.00

EUROPE & ROW:

☐ *EU Print + Digital:* £77.00

☐ *EU Print:* £68.00

☐ *ROW Print + Digital:* £77.00

☐ *ROW Print:* £68.00

PAYMENT DETAILS

☐ Postal Order/Cheque ☐ Visa/MasterCard ☐ Maestro

Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code HCC1018P on the back

Cardholder's name.....

Card no: (Maestro)

Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....

Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 4th October 2018. AV Tech Media collects your data so that we can fulfil your subscription. We may also, from time to time, send you details of AV Tech Media offers, events and competitions but you always have a choice and can opt out by emailing us at unsubscribe@ homecinemachoice.com. Please select here if you are happy to receive such offers by email ❑ by post ❑ by phone ❑. We do not share or sell your data with/to third parties. Details you share with us will be managed as outlined in our Privacy Policy here http://www.mytimemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy.

POST THIS FORM TO: HOME CINEMA CHOICE, MY TIME MEDIA LTD, 3 QUEENSBRIDGE, THE LAKES, NORTHAMPTON, NN4 7BF

Please visit **www.homecinemachoice.com/terms** for full terms & conditions

CODE HCC1018P

Let's get digital

Video-on-demand services allow you to add to your home cinema diet of Blu-rays and broadcast TV. But which one(s) to sign up to? **Team HCC** assesses the merits of seven streaming platforms, big and small

Amazon Prime Video

What's the attraction?

Value, pure and simple. Unlike Netflix, Amazon Prime Video is part of a package deal. This is both a strength and weakness for the service, which can often come across as a bit of a jumble. Prime Video could be seen as the garnish to Amazon's annual £79 free-delivery fee; *HCC* readers will probably see it the other way around. Prime Photo storage is included in the price, but Prime Music Unlimited isn't. Whatever way you digest it, the sheer wealth of material makes Prime difficult to ignore. Content can also be downloaded to mobile gadgets for offline viewing.

What's on?

Much like its key rival, Amazon has invested heavily in original content production, and has some mouth-watering exclusives. *Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan*, a CIA actioner starring John Krasinski, is the latest high- profile addition to its original content roster. It joins *The Man in the High Castle*, *American Gods*, and *The Tick* (amongst others) on the platform – all are recommended. Other exclusives worth bingeing include *Preacher*, *Mr Robot* and *Outlander*, not to mention Clarkson and gang in *The Grand Tour*.

Amazon Prime's movie catalogue is eclectic and relatively fresh. Current titles include *Detroit*, *Red Turtle* and *The Florida Project*. There's also quite a few culty oddities available too – *Star Crash* anyone?

Significantly, Amazon is also moving into the live broadcast arena, kicking off with coverage of the US Open, and following with Premier League football next year. It is also developing a mega-budget series based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* universe. If it gets that right, we could have one streaming service to rule them all.

Where to get it?

Amazon Prime Video is near ubiquitous. In addition to viewing on PCs and mobile devices, it's a standard fixture on most connected TV platforms, next-gen games consoles, Virgin Media's V6 box, and, of course, Amazon's own streaming Fire TV devices.

What's the AV story?

This is an excellent source of native 4K content, with a sizeable selection of TV and movie material available if your broadband speed is up to snuff (Amazon recommends 25Mbps). Yet it doesn't actually go out of its way to promote HDR. It also, ostensibly, encodes in HDR10+, the dynamic metadata alternative to Dolby Vision, although this can only be viewed on select Samsung TV apps at present, and isn't flagged. The service is also supporting Dolby Vision. *Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan* is its first encoded show, available if you're watching using a Prime client on a compatible Dolby Vision TV. Owners of the brand's Fire TV devices will also be able to listen to Jack's exploits in Dolby Atmos, via Dolby Digital Plus. That said, the majority of new content on the platform is 4K HDR10 and 5.1. Older fare can be HD or SD, stereo or mono.

***Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan* is a new original arrival – pick up a Fire TV player (below) to watch it with Dolby Atmos audio**





What's the verdict?

When it comes to content breadth and AV quality, Amazon Prime is at the leading edge. Unfortunately, it doesn't offer a great user experience. There are no user profiles and simply locating material can be a challenge. Amazon doesn't offer a 4K viewing default either – fans eager to see football doc *All Or Nothing: Manchester City* in UHD had to take to the 'net and ask advice on how to view it in 4K, as it wasn't readily obvious from the Prime app (our advice is search using the PC app). Learn to live with its kooky interface, though, and there's a lot here to enjoy.



AMC's *Preacher* streams on Prime Video in the UK

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/LIU ZISHAN

Apple iTunes

What's the attraction?

The main appeal of iTunes for film fans is its volume of 4K HDR/Dolby Vision movies. In fact, it has by far the biggest Dolby Vision collection in Europe. What's more, following the recent launch of tvOS12, iTunes has added Dolby Atmos audio to a decent number of its titles.

The platform runs on a buy or rent basis; there's no subscription model. Pleasingly, Apple charges the same for 4K/HDR titles as HD ones – usually between £9.99 and £13.99 to buy, or £4 to £6 to rent. Some rivals have reduced their 4K HDR pricing to match or slightly beat Apple's, but iTunes tends to provide the superior viewing experience thanks to its widespread 4K/HDR/Dolby Vision/Atmos support.

Another great feature is that HD versions of films you may have purchased through iTunes in the past are automatically upgraded to 4K in your library wherever a version is available. iTunes also benefits from an unusually friendly interface, at least on the Apple TV 4K box, complete with Siri voice support.

What's on?

The platform carries well over a thousand movie and TV titles, covering all popular genres and including material from Hollywood's major studios. The latest blockbusters tend to appear on iTunes as soon as their streaming distribution 'window' opens (and are often available with extra features). At the time of writing, for instance, you can buy or rent *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Rampage* and *Ready Player One*. The service is currently more comprehensive with films than TV shows, though.



If it's fresh blockbusters in 4K HDR you're after, iTunes is a must-look

Where to get it?

The best place is the Apple TV 4K box, as this is currently the only device that lets you play titles in their 4K/HDR/Atmos glory. You can, though, access iTunes from your Mac, PC, and iOS device. iTunes doesn't support Android devices due to Apple's digital rights management. Pah.

What's the AV story?

If it's 4K you're interested in, there are over 600 movies on iTunes, and nearly 350 playout in Dolby Vision. More than 120 others are available in HDR10, and there are nearly 150 titles available with Dolby Atmos sonics. This is all great news for AV fans – the only disappointment is that Disney doesn't currently provide any of its films, including Marvel and *Star Wars* titles, to iTunes in 4K or HDR.



The 4K TV box supports Dolby Atmos audio

What's the verdict?

iTunes in conjunction with an Apple TV 4K box has become a terrific platform for AV fans. The £180 hardware cost is comparable to a 4K BD spinner; you might find it a more convenient option.

FilmStruck Curzon

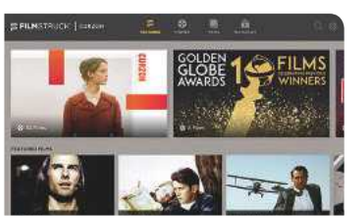
What's the attraction?

Launched in the UK last year, FilmStruck Curzon is pretty much summed up by its home page brief announcing 'a curated collection of critically acclaimed films and hard-to-find gems from iconic directors...' It lives up to this promise, sporting an assortment of arthouse movies and a good batch of those elusive 'I've-always-wanted-to-see-that' titles. Pricing is £5.99 per month for all you can eat (and you can cancel anytime) or annual membership at £59.90 (which works out at £4.99 per month).

What's on?

There are currently more than 220 films to choose from with titles being added all the time. Lists are categorised into tabbed genres and themes, with the latter subdivided into subsections such as 'Directorial' Debuts', 'Dark Nights of Horror' and 'Foodie Films'. You can dive in and catch a film noir staple like *The Big Sleep*, or seek out hard-to-find masterworks like Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams*. And don't be put off if you think the site might be looking down its nose on unschooled earthlings; there's also crowd-pleasing fare such as *Kelly's Heroes* and *Grand Prix*. As well as being the UK's exclusive streaming distributor of The Criterion Collection (plus its legendary bonus materials or 'Criterion Editions'), FilmStruck Curzon offers a raft of documentaries, directors' cuts, deleted scenes and hosted intros.





Exclusive bonus content and curated collections are part of the package



***Kelly's Heroes*: one of FilmStruck Curzon's more crowd-pleasing flicks**

Where to get it?

Check it out first on www.filmstruck.com/uk. The website is intuitively laid out, includes a search engine, and allows members to create their own watchlists. Supported devices include laptops, mobiles, tablets, Amazon Fire TV and Apple TV. A FilmStruck app for iOS and Android enables on-the-go viewing with Wi-Fi access. Chromecast devices will be added in the future, we're told.

What's the AV story?

Streaming on a desktop or other device is straightforward, and a standard 'net connection (5Mbps is recommended) delivers detailed, buffer-free imagery. While the picture peaks at 1080p (not 4K), you shouldn't expect any immersive audio heroics. Owing to the nature of much of the filmed content – and based on a typical title's age and budget – you won't find many, if any, films that were originally mixed in Atmos anyway. The audio codec is Dolby AAC, which supports lossy 5.1.

What's the verdict?

With Netflix having once boasted of being the one-stop shop for everything, its library of 'classics' has diminished over recent years, leading to the rise of boutique streaming services like this one. You may not find all the goodies you're looking for (as in the complete BFI's 'Critics' Top 100' list), or epoch-changing titles like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (yet), but the monthly fee is reasonable, the Criterion link will appeal to some, and the service is still growing. >

Mubi

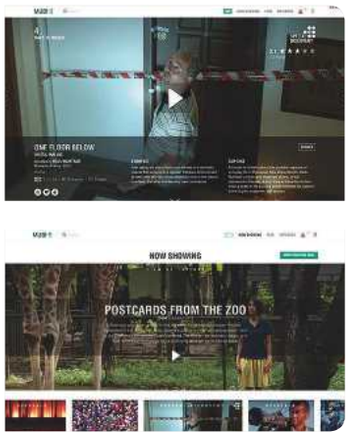
What's the attraction?

While most other streaming platforms are based around either an all-you-can model or a massive library of pay-per-view treats, Mubi approaches things (a lot) differently, delivering a selection of only 30 movies at a time. One is added every day (you can receive a daily email notification if you wish), and one removed.

Enjoying this selection will cost you £7.99 per month (there's been a price rise from a previous £5.99 fee), but Mubi does offer a few extras. Chief among them is the ability to download content to devices for offline viewing (you're given a 48-hour window to watch). The service offers an extensive collection of movie reviews, articles and opinion too.

What's on?

Mubi has an open-minded approach to foreign language, independent and vintage/cult movies. You're unlikely to find a Marvel blockbuster in its library anytime soon, but you may get a run of Ang Lee movies, the latest Canadian werewolf horror, or a legendary slice of Soviet propaganda (1964 movie *I Am Cuba* was showing at the time of writing). It's very eclectic, but there's curation too – director-themed double/triple bills are frequent, plus 'hand-picks' from industry figures. Expect a slate of horror titles to surface around Halloween.



Mubi tells you how many days you have before a film falls off its 30-day roll

Where to get it?

In addition to browser access on your desktop computer, you can find the Mubi app on iOS and Android smart devices; PlayStation consoles and the Nvidia Shield; Sony, Samsung and LG smart TVs; and Roku, Amazon and Apple TV streamers.

What's the AV story?

Mubi uses 'adaptive streaming' to deliver up-to-HD resolution, but this is content dependent – with its library stretching far and wide, be prepared for the occasional title where an HD asset hasn't been sourced. There are no 4K or HDR options on offer, nor next-generation audio.

What's the verdict?

Compare the monthly fee here to, for instance, Netflix, and Mubi clearly comes up short in terms of available content and technological appeal. For what it offers, it is rather expensive. We love the service's ambition, though, and its curated library always throws up titles worth a watch. However, the dedicated movie buff that is Mubi's target consumer may find they already own such titles on DVD or Blu-ray – maybe take up the free seven-day trial offer.

Netflix

What's the attraction?

Netflix and chill. With over 130 million subscribers, Netflix is a streaming goliath. For many, it's the ultimate binge-watching service. With a user interface honed for ease of use (a User Profile system allows five different viewers to maintain their own curated areas), plus an exhaustive content library and offline viewing, the thought of living without Netflix will be anathema to many. This probably explains why it's bullishly pursuing an aggressive pricing strategy.

Monthly price plans are Basic (£5.99 a month), Standard (£7.99) and Premium (£9.99). The cheap option limits you to one device and SD streams only, the Standard plan extends access to two devices and HD streams, and Premium allows four devices to be used at the same time, and unlocks UHD. Yet Netflix has recently used Europe to trial a €17 Ultra price point that shifts HDR access up from Premium.

What's on?

With a slew of quality originals (this year Netflix ended HBO's 12-year Emmy domination, securing 112 nominations for its shows) you'll forever be playing boxset catch-up. The Netflix Marvel TV universe is one obvious attraction – *Daredevil*, *Punisher* and more combine to offer a gritty alternative to the MCU. Netflix is also home to *Star Trek Discovery*, a twisty new take on the Trek TV universe. SF and fantasy dominate, however originals like Matt Groening's *Disenchantment*, *GLOW* and *The Crown* keep viewer appeal wide. Less obviously, Netflix harbours a strong selection of anime, both co-produced and licensed.

There's a large selection of catalogue movies, but of possible greater interest are its original features. The Will Smith cop and ogre mash-up *Bright*, Idris Elba's unforgiving *Beasts of No Name*, and Bong Joon-ho's *Okja* are all worth a viewing. The global streamer is also now snapping up first distribution rights for studio movies, such as *Annihilation* and *The Cloverfield Paradox*, and Andy Serkis's *Mowgli*, which will stream next year.

Where to get it?

The most widely accessible of all the streaming services, Netflix is available on PC and mobile devices, and is a fixture on virtually all smart TV platforms – even down to the point where it has its own button on TV remotes. You'll also find the Netflix app on consoles, set-top boxes and some streaming media players.

What's the AV story?

The majority of Netflix originals are available in 4K with 5.1 audio, while exclusives and licensed content are more often than not HD and multichannel. If you own an LG or Sony OLED flatscreen, you'll likely get Dolby Vision HDR on a selection of programmes, as well as Dolby Atmos audio. Netflix is continually refining its codecs, and image quality is excellent. It recommends 25Mbps for UHD, but great results can be had at 15Mbps.

What's the verdict?

Thanks to an expansive catalogue, polished user experience and superior AV chops, Netflix remains a no-brainer for AV enthusiasts. We're nervous about its eagerness to price gouge subscribers, though.





Netflix's original content ranges from Marvel action (*Iron Fist*, top) to Matt Groening animation (*Disenchanted*)

4K HDR and Dolby Atmos are on the menu, with content clearly flagged



MARATA VISION

SONY 4K

VPL-VW760ES



- NEW Native 4K HDR LASER Projector
- 4K Resolution: 4096 x 2160
- Laser Light Source
- 2000 ANSI Lumen Brightness
- Up to 20,000 Hours Maintenance Free
- HDR Compatibility
- Exceptional Dynamic Contrast
- 4K Motionflow and Reality Creation

T: 01923 495595 F: 01923 495599 E: info@marata.co.uk www.marata.co.uk

Marata Vision 20 Greenhill Crescent, Watford Business Park, Watford, Herts, WD18 8JA. UK

CELEBRATING
THE YEAR'S
BEST PRODUCTS



EISA
EXPERT IMAGING AND SOUND ASSOCIATION

GLOBAL AWARDS 2018-19

visit *www.eisa.eu* for the winners

EISA is the unique collaboration of 55 member magazines and websites from 27 countries, specialising in all aspects of consumer electronics from mobile devices, home theatre display and audio products, photography, hi-fi and in-car entertainment. Now truly international with members in Australia, India, Canada, the Far East and USA, and still growing, the EISA Awards and official logo are your guide to the best in global consumer technology!

TESTED BY THE EXPERTS ■ WWW.EISA.EU

Now TV

What's the attraction?

Now TV is the streaming arm of Sky, so delivers you the premium content that Sky subscribers pay, well, a premium for, without the hassle of installing Sky hardware or signing up for an annual membership. The service is divided into 'passes' – Sky Cinema (£9.99 a month) is our focus here, but there are also Entertainment, Kids and Sports options, plus the newer Hayu pass, which appears to be an option for reality TV show addicts.

What's on?

Content deals with the Hollywood majors have long been used to entice subscribers to Sky's satellite platform, and these are put to brilliant use here. The movie selection of a Sky Cinema Pass is a league ahead of most (bar the buy/rent merchants) when it comes to films that have actually seen the inside of a cinema in fairly recent memory – the selection at the time of writing includes *Blade Runner 2049*, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*; *Happy Death Day* and *Thor Ragnarok*. Then there's an extensive back-catalogue encompassing the likes of *Alfie*, *Amistad*, *Aliens* and *Another 48 Hrs.* (and that's just under the letter A in the search tool). There's little sign of the catalogue being padded out with DTV rubbish.





Now TV devices include an HDMI stick and Freeview HD-integrated player

***Star Wars: The Last Jedi*: a recent arrival to the Sky Cinema pass**



Where to get it?

In addition to online watching, you'll find a Now TV app on the smart hubs of LG and Samsung TVs (but not all of them, so check first), and the Xbox and PlayStation consoles. The service is more prevalent on streaming devices (Roku players, Chromecast, Apple TV), and, obviously, on Now TV hardware – the Now TV Stick sells for £15 (or £20 with a free pass option).

What's the AV story?

A sad one. While Sky Q has led the charge for 4K movies, there's no sign of it on Now TV (nor immersive audio, nor 5.1 for that matter). Content is capped at 720p (even through Now TV hardware), although a move to 1080p has been pledged by the end of the year.

What's the verdict?

The availability of budget-priced hardware to bring Now TV to any flatscreen is a plus point, as it means you aren't limited by third-party support, and the strength of the film catalogue is superb. Competitor platforms certainly offer more AV thrills that give physical discs a run for their money, but if your streaming interests are all about movies, the Sky Cinema pass is worth investigating.

Rakuten TV

What's the attraction?

A new player in town, subscription-free Rakuten TV offers access, via apps built into most of the latest TVs, consoles and PC platforms, to a library of (mostly film) content on a buy/rent model. There's a growing stock of films available in 4K and HDR on some screens, and it supports Dolby Vision and Atmos on select titles via recent LG TVs.

Pricing is rather inconsistent, but it's generally cheaper than iTunes. For instance, *Rampage* can be bought in 4K HDR for £11.99, or rented for just £3.99. Most UHD films cost the same as their HD versions.

What's on?

Rakuten TV offers around 200 TV shows and 1,000s of films. What's good is that there's a steady stream of fresh content (as with iTunes, *Rampage*, *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Ready Player One* were all available at the time of writing). Deals have been struck with all the major film studios, though inevitably the TV selection does not include anything from Amazon or Netflix. HBO series are present, however.

Where to get it?

It's widely available, but AV quality options vary between platforms. Apps are built into LG, Sony, Samsung, Philips, Hisense and Panasonic TVs, but 4K HDR support is currently only offered on Samsung (2015 and newer Tizen models) and LG WebOS TVs from 2016 on. The service is also available through the Xbox 360/Xbox One, as well as iOS and Android devices, Windows PCs/Macs, Chromecast, Roku sticks and Freesat boxes.



Rakuten's appeal is its slate of new movies – in 4K if you have specific hardware

What's the AV story?

At least 20Mbps of broadband speed is suggested for 4K streaming, which is decently accessible, but there's no way of telling exactly what broadband speed/resolution you're getting, though.

You can get more than a hundred films in 4K HDR with 5.1 audio on Samsung and LG TVs; Dolby Vision/Dolby Atmos titles on LG's 2018 OLED TVs are currently much rarer. If you're not using relatively recent Samsung or LG displays, Rakuten TV apps are currently restricted to HD, SDR and 2.0 audio. But this may change in the future.

What's the verdict?

More 4K HDR material on more devices would be good, but Rakuten TV is doing well for content as a whole, and its selection of 4K HDR/Dolby Vision/Atmos films is constantly rising and a clear focus for the platform. Highest-quality content is well priced ■

'NO KILLING WHAT CAN'T BE KILLED'

The Predator is back – **Mark Craven** worships at the oversized feet of one of Hollywood's finest cinema monsters



The Predator returns to cinemas this month in *The Predator* (main pic)











ON THE FACE of it, *Predator* is just another big dumb action movie, complete with Arnold Schwarzenegger, an arsenal of heavy artillery, and a straightforward plot concerning a team of elite troops being picked off by a lone foe. But fans of this 1987 hit know better, considering it a high point of the decade, of Arnie's career, and action/sci-fi cinema. And now, just past its 30th anniversary, a new entry in the saga is arriving in theatres, while the original movie, plus two sequels, are being reborn on Ultra HD Blu-ray. 2018 is an exciting time for fans of the dreadlocked trophy hunter.

Not many franchises have this sort of staying power, or have lasted this long without descending into DTV dross (although it came close...). But with only five movies released over the three decades, has Hollywood missed a trick? And how do those movies stack up?

'I ain't got time to bleed'

Along with Twentieth Century Fox's other great killer alien series (*Alien*), *Predator* has something that much of the competition doesn't – originality. Its antagonist isn't just a guy in a rubber suit, even though it actually is, and played with graceful, animalistic charm by 7ft 2in man-mountain Kevin Peter Hall (once, famously, Jean-Claude Van Damme had been deemed unsuitable for the role during early production). Nor is it slaying victims for no reason – instead we have an extra-terrestrial that hunts for sport, arming itself with funky weaponry, an invisibility cloak, and a pocket-sized nuclear bomb in case it needs to bring an early end to proceedings. It's an idea that feels like it came from a fan-favourite comic book, not the notepad of scriptwriting duo Jim and John Thomas.

Going up against the title character is Schwarzenegger's special forces rescue expert, backed up by plenty of muscle in the form of Carl Weathers, ex-WWF wrestler Jesse Ventura and Sonny Landham. It's a testosterone overload, but the subject matter demands it, and we're quickly shown that this will be a fight where brains, and not sheer brawn, are required.

There's more that marks *Predator* out as an A-grade endeavour. John McTiernan directs the jungle-set action with an assurance that he carried into the likes of *Die Hard* and *The Hunt for Red October,* Alan Silvestri's score [see *HCC* #288] sends shivers up your spine, and Stan Winston's creature design looks frighteningly real. And, most importantly of all, it's a movie with notable tension, keeping its villain under wraps for its opening act and dragging its viewers into the mystery along with Arnie and pals.

With *Predator* earning nearly $100m from its $15m budget, Fox naturally began planning a sequel, and delivered *Predator 2* three years later. Yet this wasn't a straight-ahead follow-up. The absence of Arnold Schwarzenegger, and John McTiernan, results in what almost feels like a reboot. Danny Glover stars as detective Mike Harrigan, tracking the titular alien across a near-future Los Angeles (the urban jungle, rather than the actual jungle), under the guidance of director Stephen >

1980s = Arnie

When the Austrian Oak ruled the multiplex

Conan the Barbarian



Schwarzenegger rose to fame in this 1982 fantasy directed by John Milius, and returned for a sequel (*Conan the Destroyer*) two years later.

The Terminator

Arnie as a monosyllabic cyborg assassin was perfect casting for James Cameron's peerless 1984 sci-fi B-movie.

Commando

Bonkers 1985 actioner featuring Schwarzenegger as a retired grunt spurred into killing countless goons to rescue his kidnapped daughter. 'Let off some steam...'

The Running Man

A Stephen King story is the launchpad for a futuristic satire on US TV culture – with plenty of ultra-violent action.

Red Heat

Arnie began learning the comedy ropes (alongside Jim Belushi) in this fun 1988 buddy cop movie from writer/director Walter Hill.

Schwarzenegger and Sonny Landham in *Predator*, and (below) *The Predator* picks up the action, 31 years on





Hopkins, whose most recent project had been *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5*.

Critical response was mostly negative, and *Predator 2* is certainly a film that's easy to pick holes in. Audiences were expected to accept Glover as an action hero, having only just seem him cast as a 50-year-old cop in *Lethal Weapon* with one eye on retirement. The violence is over-the top, with blood splattering everywhere. The time jump to 1997 is almost completely pointless. Supporting actor María Conchita Alonso appears incapable of delivering even simple lines of dialogue.

But, but, but... in its own madcap way, *Predator 2* is brilliant. The seriousness of its forerunner is jettisoned in favour of a tongue-in-cheek, larger-than-life narrative, where renegade cops chase drug dealers across rooftops, the Predator has a xenomorph skull in its trophy cabinet, and Gary Busey dons a silver HazMat suit and quotes *The Wizard of Oz*. Its final 40-odd minutes, where the action segues from a subway shootout, to a tense game of cat and mouse in a slaughterhouse, to a final fight in the Predator's ship, is a masterclass in relentless pacing.

Despite earning a cult following, *Predator 2*'s weak box office killed the chance of any possible direct sequel. Once again, the franchise went back to the drawing board – but in two different directions.

'It just came alive and took him'

A face-off between the extra-terrestrial stars of *Alien* and *Predator* had occurred as early as 1989, in a series of Dark Horse comics. This franchise-melding concept then became a spec-script, acquired by Fox in 1991, where it languished throughout the 1990s as the studio delayed putting both its eggs in one basket. During that time, Robert Rodriguez wrote his own script for a standalone *Predator* sequel, where this time the action moves to the creatures' home planet...

Both films would eventually be made, but it was *Alien Vs Predator* that would come first in 2004. Directed by Paul WS Anderson, and with original *Alien* writers Dan O'Bannon and Ron Shusset helping with the story, it cooked up a sub-Antarctic battle royale where a Predator and Sanaa Lathan's human explorer form an alliance to overcome a swathe of acid-blooded beasties.

In one way the film was a risk for Fox, as it effectively put the lid on any future *Alien* movies and drew the ire of the franchise's leading lady Sigourney Weaver – she said the film was 'something I'm quite happy not to be in.' Yet at the same time, that franchise had lay dormant for seven years, and it was 14 years since the Predator had been in cinemas. Was there really much to lose?

Running for a brisk 100 minutes, and not allowing a convoluted backstory to get too much in the way of the promised clash of the titans, *AvP* isn't the disaster some will have feared. It's an effective B-movie, with enough nods and winks to its parent films to keep fans onside. James Cameron famously rated it as his third favourite *Alien* flick.

A sequel, *Aliens vs Predator: Requiem*, duly followed three years later. Unfortunately for those



who bothered to watch it, this proved to be one of the most depressingly idiotic movies to hit cinemas in decades, with an uninvolving plot and poorly staged action. Anyone desperate to see an outer-space monster wreaking havoc in smalltown America is advised to watch *The Blob* instead.

'This is getting better by the minute'

Once *AVP:2* had finished horrifying film critics and studio bean counters, Fox did the only sensible thing. Ridley Scott was greenlit to continue exploring the *Alien* universe with *Prometheus*, and Robert Rodriguez – a decade after he had penned his *Predator* sequel script and by now considered a Hollywood heavyweight – was asked to reboot the series. The result, which Rodriguez produced, but did not direct, was 2010's *Predators*, where Adrien Brody (pictured above) fills the boots of Schwarzenegger and Glover as a military mercenary facing his toughest challenge yet.

Predators is a worthwhile addition to the franchise, with thrilling action beats, a fan-pleasing expansion of the series mythology, and an obvious desire to hark back to the original with its jungle-bound setting. Yet it's hard to watch it without getting the feeling that Rodriguez's initial pitch of taking audiences to the Predator planet had been lost along the way, replacing a potential super-size story with something smallscale and compact. He confirmed as much during the film's publicity run, saying that in its potential sequel 'you can really go crazy'.

But that never sequel happened. Instead, in 2014, yet another 'reboot' was ordered, with screenwriter/director (and minor cast member in 1987's *Predator*) Shane Black calling the shots. It's this movie, dubbed *The Predator*, which arrives in cinemas this month, carrying the expectations of a generation of fans on its shoulders. In the post-*Deadpool*, post-*Logan* landscape, the promise is of an R-rated fright-fest rather than a watered-down imitator, and one that follows on from the events in *Predator* and *Predator 2*, enlivened by Black's legendary sharp ear for dialogue.

Potential sequels have already been teased, with the caveat that box office business has to be assessed first. For die-hard *Predator* enthusiasts, it's a story we've heard repeatedly over the last thirty years. Right now, we're just happy to see the iconic creature given another shot at glory – and to watch Arnie shout 'Get to da chopper' in 4K while we wait ■

The *Predator 3-Movie Collection* boxset is reviewed on p98

REL
ACOUSTICS LTD

HT/1205

The Pure Home Theater Subwoofer

Serie HT is designed specifically to answer the challenge of creating exceptionally dynamic, undeniably powerful, pure home theater subwoofers at truly attractive pricing. This is not the dull, slow boom that characterizes low-cost subwoofers. This is the culmination of over 25 years designing and engineering subwoofers to deliver the extraordinary dynamics of a genuine theater experience.



Experience the HT/1205's 12" CarbonGlas™ (300cm) driver and powerful 500W Class D amplifier.
Visit **rel.net** to learn more and find a Serie HT dealer near you.

Join the Pursuit™ | rel.net

Double delight

Twin screens, 5.2.2 audio and multiple sources – this smart-looking media den offers more than meets the eye, says **Mark Craven**



WOOF WOOF!
Wes Anderson animation *Isle of Dogs* wags its tail on BD p91

KIT CHECKLIST

ARCAM: AVR390 AV receiver
EPSON: EH-TW9300 4K upscaling projector
SCREENLINE: Motorised micro-perforated 2.2m-wide projector screen
ARTCOUSTIC: 2 x SL 4-2s (L/R); 1 x Multi SL Soundbar (centre); 2 x Target 2.1s (surrounds); 2 x Architect 2.1s (height)
DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY: 2 x SuperCube 6000 subs
SONY: 65in A1 OLED TV
SONY: UBP-X800 4K Blu-ray player
SKY: Sky Q PVR
APPLE: Apple TV streamer
GOOGLE: Chromecast
RTI: XP3 processor with PCM4 module; controllers
RAKO: Lighting control
DARKLIGHT DESIGN: Lighting fixtures



THIS MEDIA ROOM, built in a modern extension on a not-so-modern cottage, gives its owners somewhere to enjoy films, music, games and TV in comfort. The challenge for install outfit ConnectedWorks was to make the best use of the limited space available, and integrate AV hardware while retaining a neat aesthetic.

The bespoke front-wall cabinetry was therefore key. Not only does it act as a home for the room's source equipment and processing hardware – 'there was nowhere to put a traditional rack cupboard,' says installer Owen Maddock – but it also provides a visual frame for the 65in Sony OLED and L/C/R speakers, and hides a drop-down projector screen, with channels on either side to conceal the screen's cloth edges.

The opposing wall features a bulkhead to discreetly mount an Epson projector, plus on-wall surround speakers and a comfy-looking corner sofa. An additional pair of speakers are fitted in-ceiling, bringing the room's array to 5.2.2. Two compact Definitive Technology subwoofers are squirrelled away in the kit cupboard. Viewing angles and speaker locations meet industry standards.

For lighting effects, the installers collaborated with Matt Zachrisson-Smith of Total Solutions. The eventual design includes strip LED lighting and recessed spots (some integrated into the wall cabinet), but none in the ceiling itself. Very slick ■

A. Slim Spitfires
The room's front left and right speakers are Artcoustic Spitfire SL 4-2s (four midbass drivers, two tweeters). These mount on-wall with a depth of only 67mm, ideal for when space is at a premium

B. What to watch?
A Sony A1 OLED (65in) is ready for everyday viewing. Available sources include Ultra HD Blu-ray, Sky Q, Apple TV and Chromecast

C. Get the bigger picture
For a larger visual experience, this 2.2m-wide 16:9 projector screen drops down in front of the TV at the touch of a button

>







D. Pixel pusher
Epson's EH-TW9300 projector scales sources to 4K and supports HDR playback

E. Built to blend
The rear bulkhead houses dramatic lighting and PJ, and matches the room's decor

F. Keeping it cool
Installing electronics including the Arcam AVR390 – plus twin subwoofers – in the closed cabinetry required some planning, with gaps at both front and rear to enable air flow

G. Sonic selector
Artcoustic's Multi SL Soundbar is designed to function either as a combined left/centre/right enclosure or as a dedicated centre speaker, as it is here





MUSICAL IMAGES

EDGWARE • BECKENHAM



PERFECT PICTURE, PURE SOUND

With 2 showrooms, 6 demonstration rooms, expertise, experience, patience and professionalism, for the very best in Home Entertainment there's no better destination than Musical Images. Featuring all the latest Home Cinema stars, **Pioneer** amps and **KEF's** space saving Ci in wall speakers, we promise every customer the finest retail and installation experience.



Pioneer
BDP-180
Blueray Player
SC LX901(Dolby Atmos Amp)

KEF
INNOVATORS IN SOUND
Ci in wall speakers



Ci3160RL-THX
Ci5160-RL-THX
Ci4100QL

Ci SERIES

HIDE YOUR SPEAKERS, NOT YOUR SOUND



3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"

Check out our NEW website
www.musical-images.co.uk

musical images
@musical_images

Musical Images Showrooms

126 High Street, Beckenham, Kent BR3 1EB
020 8663 3777 beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

173 Station Road, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 7JX
020 8952 5535 edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

Opening times - 9.30am to 5.30pm. All branches are closed on Wednesdays

HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE

All play and no work

Mark Craven reports on a former home office converted into an Atmos theatre for a film fanatic with envious friends



KIT CHECKLIST

CABASSE: 3 x Altura IW in-walls; 4 x Minorca IW in-walls; 4 x 17ICD in-ceilings; 1 x Santorin 30-500 subwoofer; 1 x Santorin 25 subwoofer
YAMAHA: RX-A3070 AV receiver
PARASOUND: Zonemaster 250 power amplifier
OPTOMA: UHD65 4K projector
DRAPER: 110in ClearSound NanoPerf screen
APPLE: Apple TV 4K
SONY: UBP-X700 4K BD player; 49in 4K TV
OUTCLASS: Media Server
DEMOPAD: Control platform
SEATING: Ex-Dolby cinema seats



JOY, THE MOVIE-MAD owner of this cinema room that combines six traditional theatre chairs with a front-row sofa, says 'she'll never need to go to the cinema again', and that she has a waiting list of friends desperate for a screening. Converting her home office (itself a former double garage) was obviously the right thing to do.

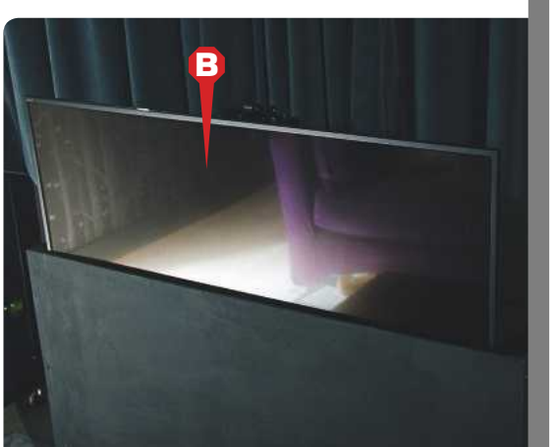
Gloucestershire hardware specialist Connected Distribution handled kit specification, and designed a system around a 7.2.4 speaker array (using Cabasse in-wall/in-ceiling models), Yamaha RX-A3070 AV receiver and Parasound amplifier (for the height channels). An Optoma UHD65 projector delivers 3,840 x 2,160 visuals, with sources including a Sony 4K player, Apple TV 4K and Outclass media server.

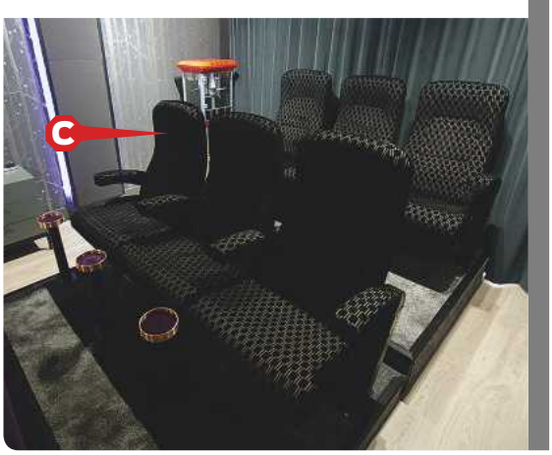
So why the addition of a sofa? Joy wanted a room that also felt like a typical lounge, so the sofa provides a prime view of a 49in 4K Sony TV that rises on a motorised TV lift. Of course, most lounges don't also have a dedicated popcorn machine... ■

A. Tap, tap, tap
DemoPad software on an iPad controls the room's Philips Hue lighting, projector screen curtains, blackout blinds and AV system

B. Sony surprise
The remote controlled TV lift brings Joy's 49in Sony 4K screen into view

C. We'll take 'em!
The six rear seats were ones previously fitted in Dolby's London screening room. Maybe somebody famous once sat on one...





Thinking of a new TV... Look at the BIGGER picture

104" ULTRA HD with HDR for less than £4K

WHY NOT BOOK AN APPOINTMENT AT OUR BRAND NEW DEMO SUITE?

We offer a side by side comparison of the latest home cinema technology including
4K Ultra HD projectors, projector screens, projector lifts
and the latest Dolby Atmos Cinema Sound.







Authorised Dealers : SONY JVC Optoma EPSON MONITOR AUDIO

PURE® THEATRE

Call 01952 898 533 or visit puretheatre.com

St Georges Road Industrial Estate, Telford, Shropshire, TF2 7QZ

REVIEWS

➜**HARDWARE** **PANASONIC** 65in FZ802 4K OLED TV **ARCAM** Seven-channel AV receiver with Dirac Live **SAMSUNG** 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos/DTS:X soundbar **PHILIPS** Range-topping OLED with B&W speaker array **REL** 12in Serie HT subwoofer **ACER** 4K DLP projector with voice control **DYNAUDIO** Premium, portable Wi-Fi/Bluetooth speaker **SYSTEMLINE** Music streamer **& MORE!**



High society

Jamo's S Series finds the brand adding Dolby Atmos modules to its traditional loudspeakers. We check out a 5.1.2 system – with a promising price tag – on p50.

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



MEN AT WORK
The Avengers are in a bit of a pickle in ...*Infinity War* on 4K Blu p90

HOME CINEMA Choice BEST BUY

Panasonic's connections with the filmmaking world have yielded stunning results, reckons **John Archer**

Hollywood comes home

We're used to hearing TV brands state that their aim is to deliver images that look as close as possible to how their creators intended – but none have been as vocal as Panasonic. And this ambition was boosted when the brand introduced its first OLED screens (beginning in 2016), propelled by the fact that many post-production houses use professional-grade OLED displays to create their movie masters.

In fact, so good were Panasonic's first OLED TVs that some studios now use them as their largescreen mastering monitors. Buy the 65FZ802 TV I'm looking at here, in other words, and you could end up watching your content on more or less the same display that it was actually created on. And you can't get much more accurate than that. (It's also THX certified, indicating that it's passed THX's roster of performance tests).

Before I get into how this quest for accuracy plays out in the 65FZ802's pictures, I'll clear up how it differs from the excellent FZ952 model reviewed in *HCC* #289. In picture terms there's no difference at all; both sets use the same core (2018) OLED panels, and the same new HCX processing chip.

The FZ952 models (65in, 55in), however, get a built-in Technics-designed soundbar (called Dynamic Blade) while the FZ802s (again, 65in and 55in) do not. The FZ952's design is more elegant and uses premium materials. That's not to say, though, that the 65FZ802 is ugly. On the contrary, it's rather fetching, with crisp, clean lines and a (mostly) super-slim rear.

Colour, contrast and detail

So does this TV live up to its picture performance promise? Absolutely. Feed it a source (4K if you can) and you get to see more of those infinite subtleties of colour, contrast and detail that video masterers agonise over than you do on arguably any other TV released to date.

During the shots on the command deck of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s 'flying aircraft carrier' in the new 4K Blu-ray of *Avengers Assemble*, for instance, subtle details in the dark corners of the room, which tend to be crushed out of the picture with other displays, are readily apparent.

The same is true during the night-time fight between Thor, Captain America and Iron Man. While many TVs show this scrap appearing against a backdrop of almost solid blackness, on the 65FZ802 you can pick out background details that give the image a much more authentic look, plus a better sense of depth and scale.

Meanwhile, as the Avengers fight their climactic battle across New York, this Panasonic reveals subtleties of detail in their costumes, and the greys and browns of the city's architecture, that make every shot look more immediate and real. This sort of colour finesse also adds to a picture's three-dimensional, full-of-depth feel. And with this flick it enhances the sense of scale that Joss Whedon was so keen to capture for the first *Avengers* film (as he explains in the movie's commentary track).

Credit for this naturalistic colour-handling lies with Panasonic's revised HCX picture processor, which, we're told, has been refined after consultation with the Hollywood filmmaking community. There's a gorgeous balance and natural toning to the FZ802's colour palette. Skin tones, in particular, stand out from the crowd courtesy of more minute tonal shifts and complete freedom from the slight orange or yellow push that can afflict flesh on less able HDR screens.

The range of colours the TV can express is also a sight to behold. A new 'dynamic' LUT (Look Up Table) system employed by Panasonic's 2019 OLEDs checks an image against its database every 100ms, resulting in an improvement in colour detail and finesse versus Panasonic's previous OLED models. The 65FZ802 can hit essentially 100 per cent of the DCI colour range used by digital cinemas, and seen as the current 'target' for HDR TV.

Dark star

The potent processing here helps engineer exquisite black levels, too. OLED is, of course, rightly lauded versus LCD TV technology for its ability to deliver beautifully >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
65in 4K OLED TV with HDR10+ support

POSITION:
Step down from the FZ952 series

PEERS:
LG OLED65C8; Sony KD-65AF8; Panasonic TX-65FZ952

1. **There's a 55in model available too, priced at £1,800**

2. **The premium remote of the FZ952 is replaced by a more standard design**





3

deep black tones, but the 65FZ802 goes beyond this by delivering more natural 'light gradations' and near-black subtlety than we're accustomed to seeing from OLED screens.

I was also relieved to notice during shots that contain a lot of 'just-above-black' picture information, such as the commercial airline cockpit sequence near the start of *American Made* on 4K Blu-ray, that the vertical banding which was quite noticeable on Panasonic's previous OLED TVs has disappeared for its 2018 models.

This prowess with black levels makes the 65FZ802 more tolerant of different picture settings than, say, LG's latest OLED screens. Also, more importantly, it means that very dark scenes on the 65FZ802 look less prone to artefacts and noise and, as a result, more consistently immersive. More like, in other words, they would have been designed to look on a pro-grade mastering monitor.

'HDR peaks are gratifyingly explosive and vibrant, while leaving the TV's rich black levels undisturbed'

Brighter than before

My main complaint about Panasonic's previous-generation OLED models was that they weren't very bright. However, on the 65FZ802 I measured a 785-nit luminance on a 10 per cent HDR window. This isn't quite as much as the 810-820 nits LG is getting out of its 2018 OLED TVs, but it's a big improvement on Panasonic's OLED predecessors. And Sony's OLED TVs, come to that.

This has a noticeable impact on performance with the FZ802 capturing the beautiful dynamics of the *Avengers* movie's new HDR grade. Exterior daylight sequences, such as those on the deck of the S.H.I.E.L.D. ship, enjoy a much more satisfying average brightness level. Bright HDR peaks, meanwhile, such as Iron Man's lasers or the blue glow of the Tesseract, are gratifyingly explosive and vibrant, while leaving the TV's rich black levels completely undisturbed.

While images aren't as aggressively sharp and detailed as those of some rival models – most notably Samsung's flagship LCD sets – the subtlety of the set's light and colour control never leaves you in a moment's doubt that you're looking at a native 4K display. This is especially apparent, of course, when you're watching a native 4K source, although the set is also very accomplished at upscaling HD material to its 4K pixel count.

The TV's motion processing helps it retain good levels of sharpness during busy scenes and sporting events. There is, though, one odd weakness of the Intelligent Frame Creation motion compensation suite: some distracting stuttering during zooms in and out of the picture. Fortunately, these types of camera movement are much rarer than vertical or horizontal pans, which the 65FZ802 copes with admirably.

With standard dynamic range sources this Panasonic looks impeccable, and turns out to be a highly engaging gaming monitor, too. I measured input lag (the time it takes



4

to render image data) at just 15ms while using Panasonic's Game picture preset – which is about as low as a premium TV is going to get.

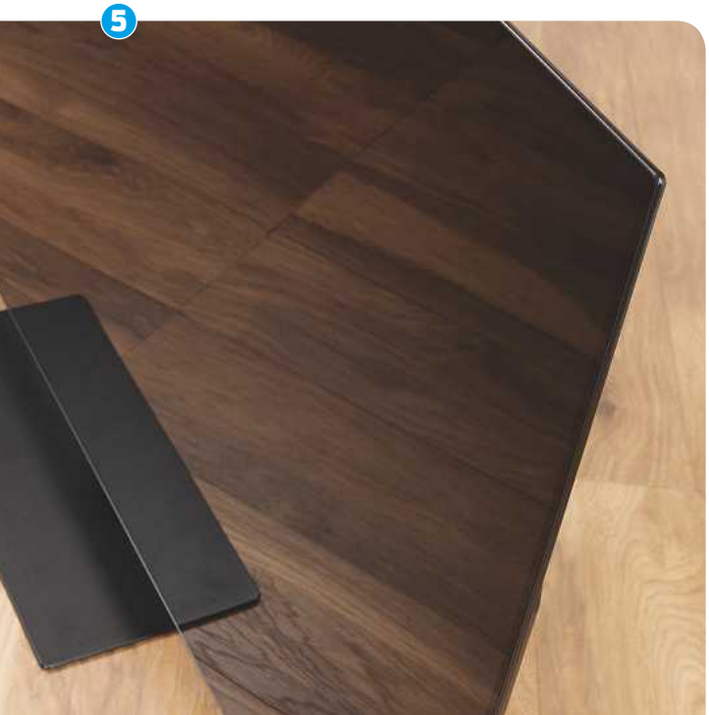
Just bear in mind that since this is an OLED screen, there's the possibility of bright, static image elements, such as game health bars or maps, gradually leaving a permanent trace of themselves behind if you don't give the screen chance to refresh itself regularly.

Audio avenger

The meaty soundbar of the FZ952 series may have gone, but the 65FZ802 accompanies its excellent pictures with impressively potent audio. The svelte frame conceals a 40W speaker system that can go loud without becoming harsh, delivers a decent amount of bass, projects *Avengers Assemble*'s robust soundtrack well beyond the TV's physical boundaries, and even manages to include an element of verticality into the mix. Though for the avoidance of doubt, it doesn't join LG's OLED TVs in supporting Dolby Atmos decoding.

So what of the set's limitations? Well, there are some, but none that do much to dampen my enthusiasm.

While remaining a stellar performer, the 65FZ802 is simply not as bright or vibrantly coloured as LG's latest OLED sets. Yet it compensates for this with more finesse in its handling of dark picture areas and colour tones.



5

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No ***4K:*** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 ***HDR:*** Yes. HDR10; HDR10+; HLG ***TUNER:*** Yes. Freeview HD; Freesat HD ***CONNECTIONS:*** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB ports; SD card slot; component video input; headphone jack; Ethernet; optical digital audio output ***SOUND (CLAIMED):*** 40W ***BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):*** N/A ***CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):*** 'Ultimate' ***DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):*** 1,449(w) x 837(h) x 62(d)mm ***WEIGHT (OFF STAND):*** 28kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; DLNA; USB multimedia playback; SD card multimedia playback; HCX processing engine; THX certification; Ultra Bright panel with Absolute Black filter; ISF mode; Panasonic TV Remote App

PARTNER WITH



AVENGERS ASSEMBLE: While John Archer's 4K platter was a US import, Disney has now brought this 2012 superhero smash-hit to UHD BD in the UK (as well as *...Age of Ultron*). Fingers crossed it's uncut this time...

It also gets nowhere near as bright with HDR content as many LCD TVs, limiting its ability to deliver that trademark 'daylight' look with bright, exterior HDR images. But, of course, it comfortably beats those LCD rivals with its black level response, and contrast-rich shots still have a vibrancy about them, courtesy of its pixel-level luminance control.

The TV also frustrates a little with its connections; it only makes two of its four HDMI inputs able to take full bandwidth 18Gb feeds. The other two could not, as a result, retain HDR playback when asked to handle the 60Hz 4K HDR Blu-ray of *Billy Lynn's Long Half-Time Walk*. This is a feature shared across rival TVs, though, and arguably of little importance if the TV is to be partnered with an AV receiver.

A final point to consider is the 65FZ802's lack of support for Dolby Vision HDR – a format embraced by competitor OLED models from Sony and LG. This may seem an odd omission from a TV intent on delivering the content creators' intention. Panasonic has long argued, however, that it backs its own processing over Dolby Vision's provision of extra scene-by-scene image data.

What's more, the 65FZ802 does support the HDR10+ system, which also uses 'dynamic metadata' to provide extra scene-by-scene information (without the need for Dolby's license fee...). Yet while there are already countless Dolby Vision sources in the market, only Amazon Video currently offers HDR10+ support. 20th Century Fox is promising to launch HDR10+ 4K Blu-rays in the coming months.

Please don't let any of the 65FZ802's limitations put you off. Its pros far outweigh its cons, and with its price and performance both taken into account, it's perhaps the most home cinema-friendly OLED TV released to date. It hasn't got a Dynamic Blade soundbar, but has a dynamism of its own ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Panasonic TX-65FZ802

→ £3,000 → www.panasonic.co.uk

WE SAY: While there are punchier OLED performers out there, the 65FZ802's finesse and accuracy makes it a real home cinema dream machine.

3. Panasonic's HCX processor uses a dynamic LUT to boost colour handling

4. As expected, the set features four HDMI inputs, all HDCP 2.2/4K-enabled

5. The TV slots easily onto its central pedestal stand

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Seven-channel AVR with Dirac Live EQ and 11-channel processing

POSITION: The baby receiver in Arcam's lineup

PEERS: Anthem MRX 720; NAD T 777 V3

Steve Withers enjoys the thrills of Arcam's no-frills seven-channel AV receiver

High-end on a budget

The AVR390 is a welcome attempt on the part of Arcam to offer many of the benefits of its premium AVR850 at a more affordable price. The cheaper model is almost identical to its expensive sibling, boasting exactly the same utilitarian but well-made chassis, simplified connections and features.



1. Arcam's backlit remote has a simple layout and good-sized volume keys

2. The front-panel design mirrors that of the AVR850

In fact, this is an entry-level product in name only, with the kind of processing and room correction capabilities that other AV receivers can only dream about.

So what's the catch? To get the price down from the AVR850's wallet-busting £4,500 to a more enticing £2,000, Arcam has swapped out the amplification for something with a little less grunt. That means the expensive Class G amplification is gone, replaced by cheaper and more conventional Class A/B.

That isn't necessarily the end of the world, and saving £2,500 shouldn't be sniffed at: you can buy a cracking set of speakers for that kind of money. In addition, since the AVR390 has 7.1.4 pre-outs, there's nothing stopping you from upgrading the amps later. In fact, if you don't need XLR connections, it's even capable of giving high-end AV processors a run for their money.

A cursory glance at the specs and you realise that the AVR390 has some genuinely high-end features, including Dirac Live, a sophisticated piece of room correction software. A few years ago, the inclusion of Dirac would have been unthinkable on a receiver at this price point, and it immediately gives the Arcam an edge over most of its rivals.

Having said that, the AVR390 isn't exactly feature-packed compared to most £2,000 AV receivers. Arcam has kept things simple to concentrate on what's important.

There's full 7.1.4 decoding of Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, with upmixing for non-immersive audio soundtracks (there's no Auro-3D decoding, but that's no great loss). Other features are Spotify Connect integration, an FM/DAB tuner, Ethernet control, and support for Arcam's MusicLife UPnP/ control app, which is currently only available for iOS.

Arcam has also extended its no-nonsense approach to the connections, with the emphasis on HDMI. The AVR390 has seven HDMI inputs and three outputs, one of which supports ARC. All are version 2.0a with support for 4K/60p, REC.2020, HDR and HDCP 2.2, except for the first HDMI input, which is limited to version 1.4 but adds MHL support instead.

The most obvious limitation is that the AVR390 only has seven channels of built-in amplification. While this is true of all of Arcam's AV receivers, it does mean you're limited to a 7.1 or 5.1.2 speaker configuration out of the box. You can always add more amps, but that increases system cost and puts the AVR390 at a disadvantage to something like Denon's AVR-X8500H [see *HCC* #285], with its 13 powered channels.



The simple life

Setup is straightforward, requiring a bit of common sense rather than a PhD. The remote is nicely designed, but the user interface feels dated and needs an overhaul. On the plus side, at least it's simple to follow. I initially tested the AVR390 in 7.1 and 5.1.2 setups, before adding an Arcam P429 four-channel amp and running a full 7.1.4 system.

Despite its acoustical sophistication, Dirac is well-designed and surprisingly easy to use. Arcam includes a calibrated microphone for taking measurements, but since there's no Wi-Fi you'll need a wired network connection to actually run the room correction software. The good news is that after about thirty minutes you'll be done, and it's definitely worth it.

There's no doubting Dirac's wizardry: turn it on and the room disappears, leaving a detailed and tonally balanced soundstage that is delivered with exceptional clarity. Dirac's room correction also does a wonderful job of integrating the subs with the rest of the system, keeping the bass both smooth and even but still powerful.

I gave the AVR390 a thorough 7.1-channel workout using the opening scene of *Dawn of the* >



HOME CINEMA Choice
BEST BUY

Planet of the Apes on Blu-ray. The film's audio is a masterclass in sound design, one that the Arcam graduates from with honours. Despite the presence of rain falling on all the channels and thunder rolling around the room, you can clearly hear the subtle breathing of Caesar as the camera pulls back from his eyes.

A choral arrangement in the background gradually rises in the mix as the apes move almost silently through the trees. Then as the hunt begins, the entire system bursts into life, surrounding the viewer with a cacophony of simian sounds that here retain a marvellous sense of spaciousness.

This opening scene is a fantastic test of everything from detail retrieval to precise effects steering and dynamic range. The amplification may have been downgraded to Class A/B but this AVR still has sufficient power to drive a decent system in a medium-sized room.

Mountain excitement

In order to evaluate the AVR390's immersive audio capabilities I started with *Everest* (Blu-ray), which has a fantastic Dolby Atmos mix. In a 5.1.2 configuration the Arcam scaled the heights in the scene where the storm hits the climbers, blasting them with snow and ice and tearing the sky with lightning and thunder. And yet within the terrifying grip of the storm, dialogue was clear and the various effects were located with accuracy.

When I switched to a full 7.1.4 system the limitations of the previous arrangement became more obvious; now sounds were spread evenly overhead, and effects were steered with greater precision around the room. The result was incredibly visceral, revealing the full breadth of the object-based audio's capabilities, and delivering an experience so realistic that I was in danger of developing hyperthermia and hypoxia.

The 4K Blu-ray of *Atomic Blonde*, and its no-holds-barred DTS:X soundtrack, came next. LFE is used in this spy caper to add weight to every savage punch and kick, delivering them with a solid percussive thump. This is particularly true during the protracted fight in the apartment block, as Charlize Theron kicks ass and takes names. The AVR390 not only displayed its ability to steer effects, integrate bass and keep dialogue clear, but also showed skill with transients, instantaneously reacting to sudden bursts of sound like gunshots. And, as is typical for an Arcam receiver, it also showed a pleasing musicality, effectively delivering the music that peppers the soundtrack (David Bowie's *Cat People* sounded particularly good).

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes ***DTS:X:*** Yes ***THX:*** No ***MULTICHANNEL INPUT:*** No ***MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:*** 11.1 phono output ***MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):*** 7 x 60W (all channels driven, 0.2% THD) ***MULTIROOM:*** Yes. Second AV zone ***AV INPUTS:*** 6 x digital inputs (2 x optical and 4 x coaxial) ***HDMI:*** Yes. 7 x inputs (6 x HDMI 2.0a/HDCP 2.2 and 1 x MHL); 3 x outputs (all HDMI 2.0a/HDCP 2.2) ***COMPONENT VIDEO:*** No ***VIDEO UPSCALING:*** Yes. To 4K ***DIMENSIONS:*** 433(w) x 425(d) x 171(h)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 15.5kg

FEATURES: Dirac Live room correction; Cirrus CS42528 DAC; FM/DAB tuner; Spotify Connect enabled; Ethernet, RS-232 and IR control; MusicLife iOS UPnP and control app; Dolby Surround and DTS Neural:X processing

PARTNER WITH



ARCAM FMJ P429: A clever idea from Arcam, the full-width, half-height P429 packs the necessary four amplifiers to create 11-channel systems with its seven-channel AVRs. Not cheap at £1,500, but offers plenty of Class G grunt.

Less power, better value?

The big question is: how does Arcam's AVR390 compare to its more expensive big brother? Well, I use the AVR850 every day as part of my reference system, and there's no doubt that it has greater horsepower under the bonnet, with increased headroom and a better transient response, and is better suited to larger systems.

That being said, the AVR390 doesn't exactly feel underpowered and it has the same processing and room correction. It's also worth remembering that even if you do opt for the AVR850, you'll still have to budget for additional amplification to run more than seven channels.

Overall, this receiver delivers exceptional value considering its build quality, features and capabilities, and offers the potential of high-end performance at a mid-range price ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Arcam AVR390

→ £2,000 → www.arcam.co.uk

WE SAY: The combination of effective processing and superb room correction make this impressive AV receiver a great choice if your focus is performance rather than bells and whistles.



3. The AVR390 has no analogue video inputs at all. It's HDMI or bust

Stars of the Silver screen

Silver Series

Surround yourself in sound with the multi-speaker Silver Series, perfect for enjoying movies to the full.



monitoraudio.com

MONITOR AUDIO



HOME CINEMA Choice RECOMMENDED

Jamo returns to the UK market with an affordable array that includes Dolby Atmos support. **Ed Selley** listens up

Onwards and upwards

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Affordable full-size speaker system with Atmos modules

POSITION: Jamo's newest home cinema line, above non-Atmos C Series

PEERS: Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos

Unlike many 'next big things' in the world of multichannel audio, Dolby Atmos has gained sufficient traction with the public to go beyond a niche product and extend into price points that don't require you to be a true 'enthusiast' to get on board. Even so, the speaker package you see here looks impressively cost effective.

Jamo has been a strong player in affordable home cinema packages since the Pro-Logic days and is back in the UK via new distribution with Henley Audio (which also handles audio marques Klipsch, Musical Fidelity and Pro-Ject). First up are the 800 Series speakers – although other models will arrive in due course.

This is a ten-strong range which can be assembled *à la carte* (more of which in a bit), but can also be bought in defined packages. This system uses the S 807 HCS package (5.0-channel), which features the S 807 floorstanders for front left/right, the S 801 standmounts as rears, and the S 81 CEN centre speaker. These five can be had for a seriously reasonable £700 and get you up and running with multichannel.

You can then augment the package as you wish. Most will plump for the £220 S 808 SUB subwoofer, unless they already have a dedicated bass-maker they don't want to replace. And then there are the S 8 ATM upward-firing Dolby Atmos speakers (£200-per-pair) to get to a 5.1.2 system, taking the total to a still very competitive £1,120.

Metal midbass

All models make use of midbass drivers hewn from a material that Jamo describes as Aluminized Polyfibre. Exactly what the breakdown of metal to other materials is in this is something that the company doesn't seem to want to be drawn on, but the result is a stiff and relatively substantial feeling unit.

The S 807 uses two 5in versions of this driver, while the S 801 and S 81 CEN make do with a smaller (4in) iteration. All of the speakers use the same tweeter, however – a 1in soft dome design – and this will hopefully ensure a smooth handover between the various enclosures.

All the speakers have a slot port system to augment their bass response without generating too much unwanted noise. The S 807 uses a front-mounted port to allow for use closer to a wall.

The S 8 ATM reflective speaker at first looks like it's typical of the breed. The design works on the angled upfiring principle that is part of the Dolby Atmos specification. There is, however, only a single driver in each speaker – an example of the 4in unit seen in the centre and surrounds – where other models (including PSB's Imagine XA and KEF's Q50A) feature dedicated tweeters. Jamo doesn't quote a frequency response for the S 8 ATM but suggests it can handle the 100Hz and up requirements of Atmos.

More unusual is how the speaker connects. Instead of a pair of speaker terminals, the S 8 ATM instead slots into four sockets on the top of the S 807. You then make the speaker cable connection at the foot of that floorstanding speaker, rather than having to have a run of cable trailing most of the way up the back.

As a final welcome touch, Jamo has had the presence of mind to design the S Series grilles in such a way that they can be moved up to meet the angled >



1. Jamo's array delivers a lot of speaker for the money

2. Two-tone cabinets and subtle branding make for a neat design

grille of the S 8 ATM, which makes for a much more streamlined aesthetic. It also makes most of its rivals – even ones at rather higher price points – seem a little ad hoc by comparison.

A caveat to this cable-decluttering installation method is that the only speakers in the S Series that have the special mounting connection and necessary speaker terminals are the two larger floorstanding models (the S 807 here and the costlier S 809), and the largest standmount (S 803), so if you want Atmos speakers at the rear of your room, you will need to change out the surround speakers too.

> 'The size of the Jamo cabinets ensures a relaxed and ultimately cinematic presentation'

Considered next to the S 8 ATM, the S 808 SUB subwoofer is far more traditional, mounting an 8in woofer in the side of a narrow cabinet that contains a 100W Class D amp. Setup is limited to an LFE/line-level input, plus phase, crossover and volume controls. There's no remote control.

Aesthetically, the Jamo pack cuts a smart figure. The brand has a long history of making either extremely ugly or very attractive speakers, with little in between, and thankfully, the S Series is one of the latter. The styling is clean and modern and the sheen rather than high-gloss white finish (black and walnut are also available), combined with the grey cloth grilles, looks excellent. They appear pricier than they actually are, and should work well in a variety of spaces.

'All you Trekkies and TV addicts...'

Connected to a Marantz SR6012 receiver, the first aspect of the Jamos' performance that I clocked was their sensitivity. This system proved able to fill a relatively large space without any appreciable feeling of strain, which further aids their value proposition.

Such unforced headroom is immediately useful when you give the speakers a soundmix with real scale. The attack on the USS Franklin by Krall's swarm ships, accompanied by the Beastie Boys, in *Star Trek Beyond* (Blu-ray, Dolby Atmos) is a sequence that the Jamos handle admirably. The dulcet tones of the New York rappers' *Sabotage* are kept distinct from the rest of the mix, and there is an enjoyable feeling of immersion from the height channels as the wave of ships engulfs the Franklin. This is no less effective as the action moves into the station itself, with the system reminding you that you're in an enclosed (if vast) space without it being overplayed.

A cohesive soundstage is maintained, with effects pans working well between the differing drivers of each speaker. And each model seems tonally even across its frequency range, and has a sufficiently wide dispersion that even with the front three enclosures spread fairly wide apart, you get a soundfield that extends well beyond the outer edge of the S 807 floorstanders. This reflects well on the centre speaker in particular, as something this compact (it's a very manageable 43cm wide by 18cm high) can struggle to achieve a creditable





3. **Jamo's ATM upfiring units connect to the top of the 807 towers...**

4. **...while their speaker terminals are located at the bottom**



sense 'bridging' the space between the front left and right channels.

The S 8 Series' performance is also up to the job with the escape of Lorraine and Spyglass into the crowd in *Atomic Blonde* (Blu-ray, DTS:X). The voices and effects in the mass of people are shunted around effortlessly, with enough weight, high-frequency clarity and tonal realism to be convincing, adding to the experience rather than distracting from it. And with all seven channels in play, there's a consistent feeling of control and precision to the soundfield, which keeps your attention focused on the screen.

It's raining audio

Jamo's height speakers do a good job of conveying the overhead audio during *Atomic Blonde*'s canopy-of-umbrellas moment and, once again, there is a very effective handover between the main speakers and their auxiliaries. There is also no overt lack of high-frequency energy from the upward-firing speakers, despite the omission of a tweeter. If you are looking for huge emphasis from your height channels – and I would argue that this would possibly be over-emphasis – these models might not be what you are looking for. Or, at least, you might want to consider using four of them. However, as a means of adding the headroom and three-dimensionality that a good object-based audio track can offer, they do a fine job for a very reasonable price.

In fact, my issues with this array, such as they are, stem largely from the other end of the spectrum. The S 808 SUB is encouragingly small and discrete for an LFE channel (and capable, the brand says, of being tucked under a sofa – albeit one with a 7in gap), but a basic lack of cubic capacity does rob it of both low-end extension and control, particularly if you are nudging the volume dial upwards. The interwoven 1980s soundtrack of *Atomic Blonde* is not a happy stomping ground for the S 808 SUB – at times literally. It simply can't start the next beat before it has finished the last one. Jamo sells a larger 10in model – the S 810 SUB – for only £45 extra, and that may hold its own rather better.

Away from such rhythmically challenging material, there is enough low-end heft here to add scale to proceedings. The shootout in Jedha in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (Blu-ray) is carried out atop a nice layer of low-end thuds and rumbles.

And in this sequence, what the Jamos do very well for relatively inexpensive speakers is ensure that fine detail isn't subsumed by gunfire and explosions. The sound of a crying child is picked out of the mix and positioned correctly, while the mechanical noises of the transporter are distinct and well defined. The larger size of the Jamo cabinets, compared to similarly priced sub/sat system rivals, means there's a more relaxed and ultimately more cinematic presentation.

The price is right

That Jamo's S Series 5.1.2 can do this while still retailing for under £1,200 – and offering some scope for more advanced system building – is the really impressive part of this package. Had this been a range with the sort of appearance that forcefully suggested they might be best placed in a darkened cinema room, I'd still consider it a worthwhile offering, but instead the S Series speakers marry a largescale (but not faultless) sonic delivery with attractive, well finished cabinets, and a slick integration of the height models that isn't present even on considerably more expensive rivals. As a result, this is a strong new arrival in the affordable full-size speaker market ■

SPECIFICATIONS

S 807
DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in Aluminized Polyfibre midbass; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Front slot-ported ***FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):*** 42Hz-26kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 90dB ***POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):*** 100W
DIMENSIONS: 915(h) x 191(w) x 252(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 15.7kg

S 81 CEN
DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in Aluminized Polyfibre midbass; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Rear slot-ported ***FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):*** 71Hz-26kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 86dB ***POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):*** 60W
DIMENSIONS: 184(h) x 435(w) x 220(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 6.3kg

S 801
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 4in Aluminized Polyfibre midbass; 1 x 1in soft dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Rear slot-ported ***FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):*** 76Hz-26kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 85dB ***POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):*** 60W
DIMENSIONS: 285(h) x 156(w) x 163(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 6.5kg

S 8 ATM
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 4in Aluminized Polyfibre full-range driver ***ENCLOSURE:*** Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): Unspecified ***SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):*** Unspecified
POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED): 50W ***DIMENSIONS:*** 191(h) x 180(w) x 242(d)mm
WEIGHT: 6.3kg

S 808 SUB (subwoofer)
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 8in Aluminized Polyfibre woofer ***ENCLOSURE:*** Slot-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 39Hz-180Hz ***ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):*** 100W ***REMOTE CONTROL:*** No ***DIMENSIONS:*** 457(h) x 354(w) x 176(d)mm
WEIGHT: 10.1kg ***FEATURES:*** Phono line input/LFE input; volume, crossover and phase control; auto on/off

PARTNER WITH



ATOMIC BLONDE: A stalwart of Ed Selley's demo disc pile, this 1980s-set spy thriller starring Charlize Theron offers stunning action choreography and an excellent DTS:X mix on both its Blu-ray and 4K Blu-ray incarnations.

HCC VERDICT ★★★★½

Jamo S Series 5.1.2
→ £1,120 → www.jamo.com

WE SAY: The superb design (with installation flourishes) and price tag catch the eye, while the performance is strong – albeit with some LFE limitations.

5. **5in and 4in versions of Jamo's Aluminized Polyfibre driver are used across the range**

The HW-N950 Dolby Atmos soundbar ups the feature spec from its K950 predecessor. **Richard Stevenson** is impressed

Samsung 'bar, cinematic sound



1

HOME CINEMA Choice BEST BUY

We were huge fans of Samsung's HW-K950 soundbar, launched in 2016. Leveraging the sonic expertise of a new audio R&D facility, it did Dolby Atmos in 7.1.4 and wowed our ears with every movie. Yet it missed some out-of-the-box features, such as DTS:X support. Meet the new-for-2018 HW-N950...

Coming in at £1,500, the HW-N950 is once again a serious, home cinema-centric proposition, comprising the main soundbar, wireless subwoofer, and two wireless rear speakers.

At 1.23m long, the 'bar matches up neatly to most 55in screens but looked equally at home under my 65-incher. The styling is more innocuous than flamboyant, featuring a steely dark-grey chassis with metal grille, and a subtle blue display (on the far right) that goes off after a few seconds. What's on the inside of the 'bar is a whole lot more thrilling.

There are 13 drivers with 13 amplifiers, rated in total at over 200W. Facing front are left, right and centre channels, each sporting two mid-range drivers and Samsung's second-generation wide-bandwidth tweeter. While this new version doesn't crossover to the mids at quite such a low frequency (700Hz compared to 400Hz on the K950), it's 700Hz-20kHz bandwidth comes with 3dB more gain and an extremely wide dispersion pattern. That should afford a much greater sweet spot across the front soundstage and indeed your sofa.

Surround duties are handled by drivers positioned in the bar's end panels, designed to bounce their output off side walls and onwards to your ears. On the top face are two upfiring drivers for front Atmos/DTS:X overhead sound. These likewise project up and out from the bar, reflecting the sound from the ceiling so that audio is perceived as coming from above.

If 5.1.2 is all the surround sound you need, Samsung's lower-cost HW-N850 does just that sub. The N950 auditioned here adds those two wireless rears with drivers for surround back channels and upward-facing units for rear overhead information.

The wireless sub, supplied with both the N850 and N950 packages, is something of a beast. A 160W amp drives an 8in driver mounted on the right side of a compact, rear-ported cabinet. It's a solid, nicely built box, if not one of great visual merit. A potential issue with placement is that the driver and rear port need a bit of space, so can't be pushed up tight to walls, cabinets or sofas.

Badges? We don't need no...

This is the first time that a badge from Harmon/Kardon (now part of the Samsung stable) has appeared on a soundbar. Should we be excited by that? Probably not. Harmon/Kardon has a great deal of audiophile kudos thanks largely to its premium automotive sound systems, and that badge is great for marketing the HW-N950 to the masses. For *HCC* readers in the know, Samsung's manufacturing scale and expertise in soundbars probably blows it away. Nice badge then, move along...

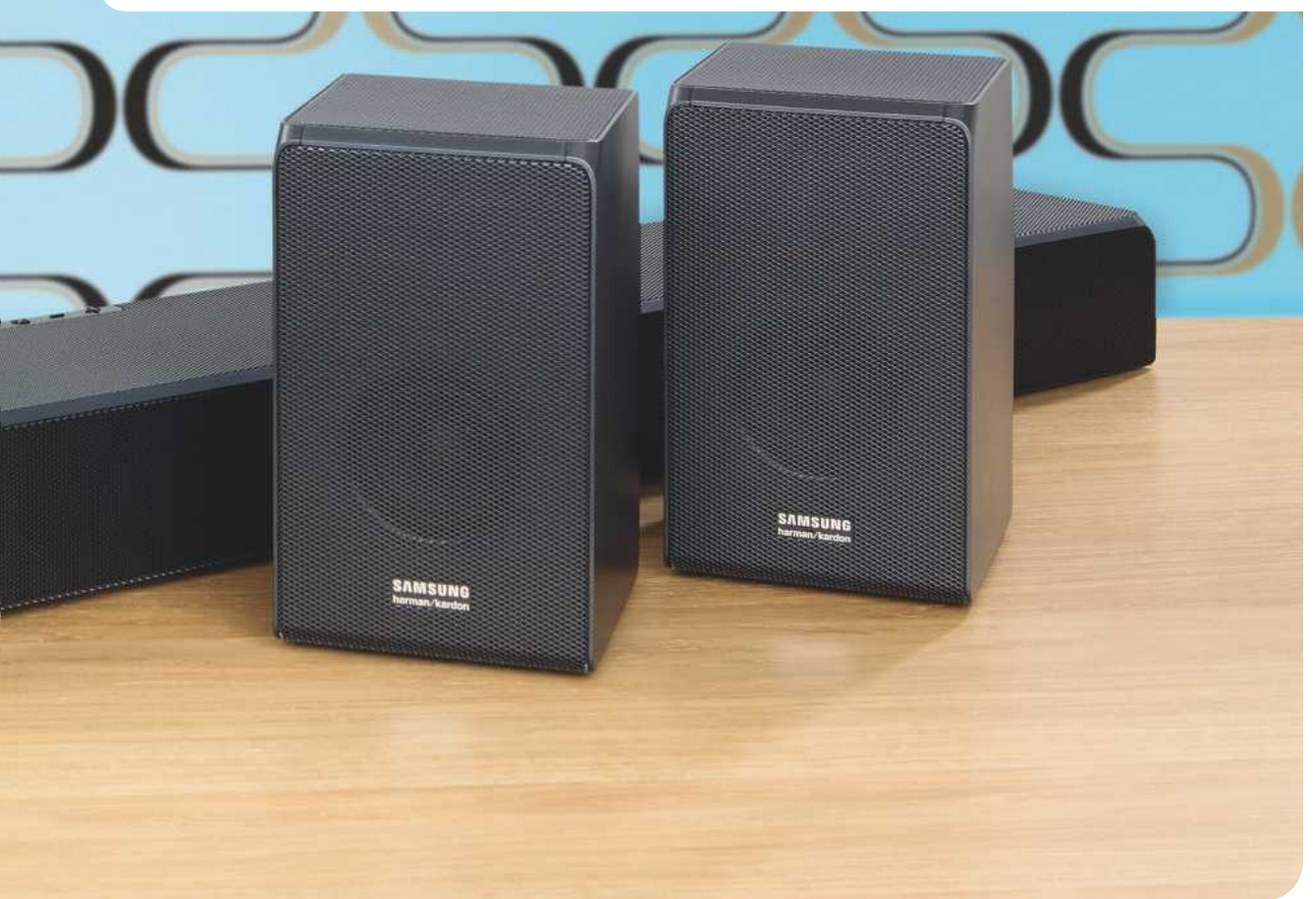
Samsung's familiar remote handles the bar's basic setup, input selection and level adjustment with info scrolling across the short display. Slicker control can be had through Samsung's SmartThings app, which is a further >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.1.4 Dolby Atmos soundbar system

POSITION:
Tops the 2018 Samsung lineup

PEERS:
LG SK10Y; Sony HT-ST5000; Yamaha YSP-5600SW



1. The HW-N950 partners subwoofer and soundbar with rear speakers



2. Samsung's slim remote is relatively clutter-free



3

improvement over last year's already pretty cool Samsung Connect. If you have a recent Samsung TV and link the HW-N950 you can throw away one remote control as they operate together pretty much as one item.

Ready, set, tweak

Without the benefit of a Samsung TV, setup was a little trickier than anticipated. Connecting the TV to the HW-N950 via Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and ARC over HDMI is all possible but I had to make several attempts and twiddles with settings, and remove a rogue HDMI cable from my system that proved unable to pass a 4K HDR signal. Remember to ensure all your sources and TV-backhaul over ARC are running bitstream rather than PCM to get the full Dolby/DTS:X experience, and expect to spend some time getting everything up and running.

It's worth it though, as the HW-N950 delivers solid-gold home cinema magic. That is particularly true of Samsung 'Smart' sound mode that subtly adjusts EQ relative to the content playing.

Kicking off with Dolby's Atmos test clips, simply to ensure it was firing on all channels, was a jaw-dropping, pinch myself, 'this is a soundbar' moment. The Atmos effects were accurately located around the room and the sound had immediacy and the sort of projection and solidity I would expect from a multichannel speaker setup. And even in my decent-sized lounge (6m x 5m), the HW-N950 sounded largescale and authoritative, with plenty of headroom for high-volume listening.

The opening of Dolby's *Amaze* clip sees the Samsung render a beautifully encompassing rain-forest ambient, complete with insect noises in all corners of the room. The sense of space is tangible as a bird flies high around the listening position. The rear speakers have a rare richness to them that most add-on soundbar rears lack; the lightning effect and rain patter shows this off well, creating believable atmospherics in 360 degrees and plenty of information from above. Low, rumbling thunder lets the sub come to the fore, with an also-rare combination (among soundbar subs at least) of bass depth and LFE tautness.

Moving on to *The Matrix* (Dolby Atmos, 4K Blu-ray), those classic demo scenes from back in the day sound better than ever. The foyer shootout is a cacophony of razor-sharp gunshot effects, thumping music and splintering marble, and the N950 doesn't gloss over anything. The main 'bar produces a very wide soundstage and the front overheads fill in above. It's solid, accurate and entertaining. And as the dialogue ensues, it is crystal-clear and articulate.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 8 x midrange, 3 x wide dispersion tweeters and 2 x upfiring Atmos units (soundbar); 1 x midrange and 1 x upfiring Atmos unit (each rear) ***AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):*** 350W total ***CONNECTIONS:*** 2 x HDMI inputs; 1 x HDMI (ARC) output; optical digital audio input ***DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA:*** Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos/DTS:X ***SEPARATE SUB:*** Yes. 8in driver, 160W amp ***REMOTE CONTROL:*** Yes ***DIMENSIONS (SOUNDBAR):*** 1,226(w) x 83(h) x 136(d)mm ***WEIGHT (SOUNDBAR):*** 8.8kg

FEATURES: Wireless rear speakers and subwoofer; SmartThings app control; 7.1.4 soundstage; auto-optimised Smart mode; remote control sync with Samsung TVs; 4K HDR passthrough; UHQ 32-bit upscaling; Bluetooth; network audio streaming

PARTNER WITH



SAMSUNG QE55Q9F: The Q9F is our current favourite LCD flatscreen, and partnered with Samsung's HW-N950 will bring about ease-of-use benefits – not to mention superb images to accompany the best-in-class sonics. Get the 55in model for £2,400.

Perhaps due to the outstanding performance with native Atmos and even Dolby Digital 5.1 audio, the HW-N950's attempt to upscale broadcast stereo to multichannel sounds a little underwhelming in comparison. It's a reasonable effect and adds scale and surround, but sticking to two-channel-plus-subwoofer feels more accurate and engaging. You may not be making full use of the whole package, but as a system for music, the HW-N950 can present a stereo tune with convincing aplomb. Hi-res FLAC, ALAC, AIFF and WAV files are supported, with Samsung's UHQ 32-bit music upscaling deployed for lower-quality sources.

A few weeks on test saw some tweaks in terms of speaker positioning. Moving the Samsung's rears a little further out from room walls delivered a most compelling overhead experience. I also ended up using +3 gain on all upfiring channels to really hammer home the overhead layer. In a different room, your mileage might vary.

Getting the soundbar off the heavy table it was initially placed on also helped add extra girth to the front soundstage and improved dialogue intelligibility. If I was living with the 'bar I would probably want to wall-mount it under my display.

Class-leading

The HW-N950 is a soundbar triumph from Samsung, and the best premium model I've heard to date. It is a compelling buy even at £1,500, as I'd argue you would be hard pushed to get close to its stellar performance with a traditional AVR and speakers at the price. It's a little fiddly to set up, you will have to find wall sockets for the wireless rear speakers, and three HDMI inputs would be better than just two – but if you want the class-leading home cinema soundbar of the day, the HW-N950 is it ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Samsung HW-N950

→ £1,500 → www.samsung.co.uk

WE SAY: Stunningly effective Atmos/DTS:X soundbar package with a home cinema performance to rival a good AV receiver and speakers.

3. **The soundbar features dual Atmos upfirers, as do the wireless surrounds**

CEDIA MEMBER

NewWave

Home Cinema Rooms

Try Triad

Expereince a truly immersive sound experience with Triad Gold & Dolby Atmos at our Kent Expereince Centre

Complete Home Cinema Solutions



DUAL PURPOSE CINEMA ROOMS



LIVING SPACE CINEMA SYSTEMS



DEDICATED HOME CINEMA ROOMS

We have expertise in designing and delivering all the elements required to create a great home cinema: design, construction, sound, projection, seating, lighting & finishes.

T: 01732 852 500
E: homecinema@newwaveav.co.uk
www.newwavehomecinema.co.uk

Visit our Tonbridge demo suite
By appointment only

CERTIFIED TRIAD Experience Centre

Philips' latest OLED flatscreen impresses **John Archer** with its B&W soundbar – as well as its 4K visuals

Raising the bar for TV sound



GEEK SQUAD
Spielberg sci-fi *Ready Player One* touches down on 4K Blu p92

HOME CINEMA Choice BEST BUY

Philips' 65OLED903 sees the brand teaming up with UK sound experts Bowers & Wilkins. The idea is that the latter's sonic knowhow, combined with Philips' picture quality prowess, results in a TV that's a genuine all-rounder, and one that delivers a cinematic experience. The partnership has certainly got off to a good start, with the OLED903 scooping the 'Home Theatre TV' prize in this year's EISA Awards.

The set also bagged an IF Design Award earlier this year. The bodywork is gorgeous – an ultra-slim, metal-finished frame perched on a pair of narrow feet that become almost invisible when you're viewing the TV head on. More visual appeal comes from Ambilight, whereby coloured light emerges from the TV's top, left and right edges, and can match the hue, intensity and location of colours in the images onscreen. It has the joint benefit of both looking cool and putting less strain on your eyes during dark-room viewing, but I'd recommend turning the feature's brightness down a few notches.

Tucked between the screen and those minimalist feet is the OLED903's full-width built-in soundbar, the first fruit of Philips' relationship with B&W. This presents a 2.1-channel configuration, with a trio of rear-mounted bass drivers (two passive, one active) joined by left/right channels combining titanium dome tweeters with glass fibre cone midrange drivers. As well as these new materials, B&W's involvement has introduced stiffer enclosures for the HF/MF units to reduce resonance; isolation of the drivers; and new motor systems.

In action, the soundbar yields outstanding results. The immense dynamics of *Deadpool 2*'s soundmix (4K Blu-ray) surprised me; bass is deep, rich and e xpands to handle the increase in sound scale that always accompanies the arrival of Juggernaut, while blending excellently with the lower mid-range and never feeling overblown. The front-firing design ensures there's a direct sound to all non-bass effects. Dialogue is therefore unusually clear and defined. Treble effects are pristine and well placed rather than harsh or lo-fi. The mid-range sounds clean, dynamic and expansive, and the audio boasts a helpful height element to it as well as a good sense of width. The only niggle is that dialogue can occasionally sound like it's coming from below the screen.



The star attraction

Great though the 65OLED903's sound is, it's still the TV's pictures that steal the show. Refinements made to its P5 picture engine work with the strengths of OLED technology to good effect.

The P5 system deals with key picture elements – colour, contrast, source optimisation, motion and sharpness – on a single chip, in an order designed to get the finest results. The processing feature with the best name – and which has the most jaw-dropping impact – is the 'sparkle and darkle' effect. Somehow this manages to achieve brightness peaks during HDR viewing that are far more dazzling than I've witnessed with other OLED TVs. Running *Deadpool 2* in 4K HDR simultaneously on the 65OLED903 and an LG OLED77C8, the extra intensity in the brightest parts of explosions, reflections on metal, and other small, ultra-bright objects, is remarkable. HDR has never looked so HDR on an OLED display. Awesome.

Interestingly, measuring the TV's brightness with a 10 per cent white HDR window settles down to a figure of around 790 nits. However, the Philips momentarily hits above 900 nits during initial measurement, providing a potential insight into how the brand's apparent 'overdriving' technology works.

Small areas of peak HDR light aren't badly 'clipped' either, still containing subtle tone and light differentiation.

The 'darkle' part of 'sparkle and darkle' finds black levels looking even better on the 65OLED903 than they usually do on an OLED TV. This is because while the darkest parts of the picture consistently look perfectly black, they also hold remarkable amounts of subtle detail.

For instance, in *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part II*, the deep black of Snape's outfit during his fatal meeting with Voldemort in the boat house is gorgeously, intensely black. Yet there's fine detailing that makes his figure look three-dimensional, and none of the hollowed-out look witnessed on screens that struggle with 'just above black' image content.

The average brightness level with full-screen HDR content is also impressively punchy, meaning it's not only the little details that catch the eye, and that HDR pictures remain watchable in a well-lit room.

The P5 processor's standard dynamic range-to-HDR upscaling is also noteworthy. The resulting image has more of a contrast hit than SDR, and this extra light and colour dynamism is added without it looking forced or unnatural. I did find it helped assigning the core contrast setting to Normal in this instance, though, rather than the brighter Best For Picture setting that is preferable for most 4K sources.

Philips processing claims to convert colours to 17-bit 'resolution', to remove banding and deliver more colour tones. Deadpool's weathered red suit appears >

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
65in 4K OLED with Ambilight, HDR10+ and Android smarts

POSITION:
Philips' premium 65in display

PEERS:
LG OLED65C8; Panasonic TX-65FZ802; Sony KD-65AF8

1. **The OLED903 uses Philips' latest P5 processing engine**

2. **B&W's soundbar revises driver materials and chassis design**

3. **The stick remote gives access to the TV's key functions and voice control**



more vibrant, yet also more refined and textured, while the walls of the X-Men mansion are clean and smoothly blended rather than banded and blocky. The brightness boost Philips has conjured up with the 65OLED903 also gives colours an appealing intensity and sense of 'volume'.

New algorithms generally keep skin tones looking natural even though other tones look enjoyably dialled up. There's still room for improvement here, though, as the occasional tone, usually during bright exteriors, can seem a touch sun-tanned. But generally the combined richness and precision of the 65OLED903's colours are hard to resist.

Poetry in motion

The P5 hits continue with motion processing. The various tools Philips provides for removing judder and blur are much more flexible than they used to be, making it easier to find a setting that suits your tastes. *Deadpool 2*'s super-fast blade fights were handled without generating significant side effects such as haloing or flickering.

The set can also be cajoled into unleashing astonishing sharpness and detail. *Deadpool 2* isn't actually the crispest 4K Blu-ray around, but running it on the 65OLED903 feels like you're looking at a whole different resolution of TV. Switching to a sharper disc, such as *Mad Max: Fury Road*,

> 'Viewing *Deadpool 2* on the Philips OLED feels like you're looking at a whole different resolution of TV'

simply confirms this impression. You can make out far more detail in the film's battered cars and desert backdrops, yet it feels entirely real and clean. How Philips has achieved this without making the 65OLED903 an 8K screen is beyond me. But I like it. A lot.

Other likeable things about the TV are that you can watch it from any angle without the picture breaking down; it's new 'magic wand' stick remote is beautifully designed and fun to use; and it delivers around 22ms of input lag in its Game picture preset. It also runs the Android TV smart interface/platform more solidly, stably and slickly than Sony's TVs. Nor does the processing power needed to run Android seem to cause slow downs in the TV's setup menus.

That said, Android remains my least favourite of the big smart TV systems. It takes over too much screen real estate, doesn't offer enough personalisation, and shows little understanding of the stuff most smart TV (as opposed to smartphone) users are interested in. Android Oreo is expected to appear on the 65OLED903 before the end of the year in place of the current Nougat system, and early evidence suggests this will deliver a big improvement. Fingers crossed.

While the upscaling of HD is usually outstanding, if your source is particularly grainy – such as *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part 2* on Blu-ray – this grain can become noticeably exaggerated, regardless of whether you stick with Philips' Ultra Resolution option or not. I even saw occasional white sparklies and ringing around grain points. Philips' noise reduction processing on its medium or high settings largely removes this noise, but can leave grain looking a bit artificial – like watching the image through a net curtain.



4. **Activate Philips' Ambilight mode for an immersive experience**

Pushing the 4K experience

Like the Panasonic TX-65FZ802 (p42) there's no Dolby Vision support here (HDR10+ is offered instead), and only two of the TV's four HDMIs support the full 18Gbps v2.0a bandwidth. Unlike the Panasonic, the focus here is less on 'director's intent' and more about pushing the 4K and HDR experience to sharper, brighter extremes. Both have their own appeal (and the Panasonic is less labour-intensive when it comes to picture tweaks), but if you want to combine OLED's contrast strengths with more of LCD's HDR-friendly brightness punch, the 65OLED903 is currently in a league of its own. And it sounds superb ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No ***4K:*** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 ***HDR:*** Yes. HDR10; HDR10+ (following an update); HLG ***TUNER:*** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite ***CONNECTIONS:*** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; Ethernet port; optical digital audio output; stereo audio input; headphone output ***SOUND (CLAIMED):*** 50W, 2.1-channel ***BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):*** N/A ***CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):*** N/A ***DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):*** 1448.7(w) x 876.5(h) x 50.3(d)mm ***WEIGHT (OFF STAND):*** 31.1kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; P5 processing engine; Android N smart system (Oreo upgrade expected later this year); Quad Core processing; B&W soundbar; Ultra Resolution; Perfect Natural Reality

PARTNER WITH



PHILIPS HUE: The brand's smart lighting range can be set up to work in conjunction with its Ambilight TVs, expanding the content-dependent light-show around your cinema room. Start with the smart 'bridge' (£50) and add bulbs/LED strips.

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Philips 65OLED903

→ £3,000 → www.philips.co.uk

WE SAY: Top-class processing unlocks every last drop of OLED's current potential, ensuring that HDR 4K sources have never looked punchier or crisper on an OLED screen.

FrontRow™ SEATING

Never has top quality home cinema seating been so affordable









FrontRow™ Serenity Modular Seating from £1,275.00

Modular design for curved and straight seating configurations
Dual motor for independent control of recliner and headrest
Recliner switches include USB charging ports
Accessories include trays and cupholder caps
Full size paper templates and CAD drawings
Large range of Fabric and Leather colours
Couch ends now available

NEW DESIGN









FrontRow™ Classic Modular Seating from £1,050.00

Modular design for curved and straight seating configurations
Recliner switches include USB charging ports
Accessories include trays and cupholder caps
Full size paper templates and CAD drawings
Large range of Fabric and Leather colours
Couch ends now available

All **FrontRow™** seating includes a space-maximising inclining mechanism that allows seating to be placed close to a wall and includes a comprehensive 5 year warranty. A free design service is available to ensure the seating configuration is suitable for your room. Call for your nearest demonstration dealer.

For further information please call: 01892 552561 or visit www.homecinemaseating.co.uk

FrontRow™ Home Cinema Seating, 69 London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0PA



Black box loves BBC radio...

You probably won't showcase it on Instagram, but the Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player is beautiful on the inside, insists **Steve May**

SYSTEMLINE ISN'T EXACTLY a household name. It's actually the custom install arm of Armour Home Electronics, the UK-based parent company/distributor of more familiar home entertainment brands such as Q Acoustics, QED and Grado.

Despite being an early pioneer in the world of whole-home entertainment, the company has managed to maintain a surprisingly low profile.

But while it hasn't grabbed the headlines, it's quietly made an art of multiroom distribution.

Systemline's anonymity could be about to change. The S7 Netlink Music Player (which also goes by an SN6210 moniker) is a network music player unlike any other I've come across.

Like all Systemline kit, it's designed to integrate within an expansive multiroom system, in conjunction with Systemline products like the two-zone stereo NetAmp, or the NetServer (which comes in 8-zone and 24-zone flavours). But more importantly, it can serve as a single-room streamer, easily partnered with an AV receiver or two-channel system. It's that iteration that we're focusing on here.

Incidentally, you can't buy a Systemline product through the usual retail channels. You get it through a Systemline dealer/installer, who will set it up for you.

Rack it and forget it

So what makes the S7 Netlink Music Player so beguiling? Well it's not the design. This isn't a piece of hardware that will attract admiring glances at your AV rack. It measures just 219mm across, and the finish is utilitarian. That said, build quality is robust. You could probably lob it out of a window and it'll be none the worse for wear (supposition: I didn't actually do that).

Connections, all found on the rear panel, include a local stereo phono input, stereo pre-outs, coaxial and optical digital audio outputs, and an optical digital input. There are various control options, including RS-232 and a 12V trigger, plus a quartet of USBs. Systemline doesn't talk about the DAC lurking inside, although we do know that it features an upsampler originally developed for a posh Myriad product.

My sample was one of the first S7 Netlink Music Players to run its own NetServer software. It's this that allows the unit to function as a standalone player, in what's called Master Mode. In a typical custom install scenario, the device would be used with a dedicated separate Systemline NetServer, in Slave mode.

Suitably freed of such constraints, I hooked it up to a resident AV receiver, outputting a 24-bit/96kHz signal over a digital connection. Alternatively, users could

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Single-zone (but expandable) music streamer

POSITION:
Part of the Systemline whole-home range

PEERS:
Bluesound Node 2; Onkyo NS-6170

connect it directly to a power amplifier and stereo speakers over analogue, and garner 24-bit/192kHz.

The former is the best option if you want to take advantage of a feature that allows the S7 Netlink Music Player to take direct control of your AVR via a two-way interface (be it RS-232 or TCP/IP); the S7 will automatically turn on the receiver, select the correct input and manage the volume. This level of control is currently available from (recent) Arcam, Denon, Marantz, Onkyo, Yamaha and NAD AV receivers. It's achieved using an integrated web setup page.

Once the unit has been installed as part of a smart home system, it can also do some quite clever stuff. For example, as an IP device, it can work in conjunction with a smart lighting system, operated by a wall keypad or via a learning remote.

I suspect most standalone users will opt for the Systemline app (iOS/Android). This features a basic list of favourites, plus clock and alarm, although there are customisable options. Alternatively, the unit proffers on-body controls.

Make a Dash

Where the S7 Netlink Music Player becomes particularly interesting is in its support for MPEG-Dash, which has been adopted by BBC TV and radio. The embedded BBC Radio Player uses the standard to offer live broadcasts, as well as on-demand catch-up.

Having dedicated BBC radio control is unusual. Most other streaming systems will play BBC stations via Tunein. The advantage of the Systemline approach is that you'll hear the best possible version of those services, a 339kbps AAC stream, for both national and local live radio. FM radio devotees should prepare to be converted. BBC catch-up programmes stream at 128kbps.

What the player lacks in cosmetic finesse, it makes up for in performance charm. Listening to live BBC radio at 339kbps is revelatory. When you're used to suffering

> 'As befits its whole-home origins, the S7 Netlink Music Player is an astonishingly flexible piece of kit'

through a 128kbps MP3 dribble delivered by an Amazon Echo Dot speaker (albeit one routed through a decent AV setup), the leap in fidelity is a delicious surprise. And it's not just music that benefits; listening to drama on BBC Radio 4 becomes startlingly more immersive.

Of the system's onboard streaming audio services, Qobuz is arguably the best-quality option, with a 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC lossless (variable up to 800kbps) stream. However, Systemline has also integrated a smart graphic control interface for the Deezer music platform, which makes it a heap of fun to use.



1. The player offers front-panel controls, but is designed to be used with the Systemline app

2. You can hook up to your AV receiver via the analogue phono or digital outputs

And then there's the left-field stuff. Radio Paradise is a commercial-free US radio station that broadcasts lossless FLAC. Probably nothing you hear will sound familiar, but the quality is undeniably thrilling. The S7 Netlink Music Player will also play 24-bit/192kHz files from USB, or over a network.

Flexible friend

As befits its whole-home origins, the S7 Netlink Music Player is an astonishingly flexible piece of kit. Quite apart from its multiroom talents, which are considerable, in standalone guise it offers a level of performance that belies its price tag.

If you're a big consumer of BBC radio, then its premium over cheaper rival streamers is easily justified. And its sound quality when upscaling disparate content sources is excellent. I'll concede it doesn't really have poster-boy appeal, but build quality is formidable.

Not your cookie-cutter media streamer then, but the S7 Netlink Music Player is a convincing advert for just how good music streaming can sound for less than a grand. I reckon it's a sound investment ■

SPECIFICATIONS

AUDIO UPSCALING: Yes. To 24-bit/192kHz ***CONNECTIONS:*** Optical digital audio input; coaxial and optical digital audio output; stereo phono analogue input; stereo pre-out ***ETHERNET:*** Yes ***BUILT-IN WI-FI:*** Yes ***DIMENSIONS:*** 219(w) x 86(h) x 160(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 1.75kg

FEATURES: 4 x USB ports; RS-232 control; TCP/IP via network; 12V trigger; AVR compatibility with Arcam, Denon, Marantz, Yamaha, Onkyo and NAD models; MPEG-Dash support; BBC Radio Player; Qobuz, Deezer, Tidal integration; favourites/playlists creation; alarm functionality; compatible with Systemline hardware; Systemline app

PARTNER WITH



SYSTEMLINE KPS11: For a long-term installation, Systemline's in-wall keypad can integrate with the S7 Netlink Music Player, bringing you touch-of-a-button access to presets, volume and playback controls.

HCC VERDICT ★★★★½

Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player
→ £700 → www.systemline.co.uk

WE SAY: Simply integrated into a single-zone system, but with whole-house potential, this well-made music streamer has sonic appeal and a good selection of in-built services.



Alexa takes control of 4K projection

Acer's V6820i budget 4K projector may offer voice control, but **Steve May** believes that silence can still be golden

THE HUMBLE HOME cinema projector is the latest piece of entertainment hardware to answer the siren call of voice control. Acer's V6820i isn't distinguished by its compact good looks or 4K trappings, more that it can be cajoled by crooning to an Amazon Alexa speaker.

As it transpires, setting this up is a right faff. By the end of the process I was ready to tell Alexa where to get off.

Firstly you need to create an account with Acer (find the site, select Work with Alexa, then Create Device Account), then bind said account with said projector, using a 22-digit serial number and matching Pair code. Then enable the appropriate skill, and partner the projector via your Acer account. Foolishly I thought I'd get away with just plonking the V6820i on my home network and getting Alexa to do the hard work.

And the end result of all this friction? The ability to turn the projector on or off by barking at your Alexa speaker; selecting the HDMI input (there are only two); and altering the volume of the V6820i's integrated sound system (which you may not want to use at all).

Hmmm. Alexa is undoubtedly well suited to things like music navigation and smart home control, but these PJ party tricks are pretty pointless. There's another good reason why you won't want to use voice control, but we'll come to that shortly. So what else does this Acer have to offer?

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K DLP projector with Alexa support

POSITION:
Below Acer's V7xxx series of 4K home cinema PJs

PEERS:
Optoma UHD51; BenQ W1700

Hey, good-lookin'

Design and build quality are certainly worth shouting about. The V6820i is relatively compact and extremely glossy. All black, it sports air inlets and outlets front and side, while an offset bronze lens, with manual zoom, provides a splash of glamour. The projector is light enough to ceiling mount or pop on a bookshelf.

The V6820i's zoom is 1.3x, and throw ratio 1.21-1.59:1. You'll need between 2.4m and 3.2m to throw a 110in image.

On top you'll find the lens shift dial (offering a maximum offset vertical lift of 15 per cent) and zoom. A menu control pad provides a hands-on alternative to the supplied backlit remote control.

Video connections comprise two HDMI inputs, both of which are 4K/HDCP 2.2-compatible, and a VGA input. There's also an RJ45 Ethernet port for control, digital audio optical output, and two USB ports, one for a Wi-Fi dongle (supplied), and the other to play media files or power a streaming TV stick. System integration comes via a 12V trigger, or RS-232 control.

There's good news if you have plenty of 3D Blu-rays. The projector is DLP 3D compatible, although shuttering glasses are not supplied in the box.

The projector feels fresh when powered up, too. Acer's user interface isn't the traditional text menu. Instead we get a (whole screen) graphical OSD with Projector, Application

and Settings tiles. The Projector button offers source (HDMI, VGA and USB) selection and display adjustment. Here you can tweak gamma, Dynamic Black and colour gamut (adjustable between REC.709 and HDR). Hit Application for access to the projector's USB media player, Wi-Fi streaming and Amazon Alexa settings.

In addition to Alexa control, you can also stream media to the projector using EZCast (yet another app for your mobile device). But here's the rub. When Wi-Fi is on (as it is when the PJ is paired with an Alexa speaker), a Wi-Fi signal gauge graphic appears onscreen and won't go away.

Silent running

Presets are Movie, Standard, Silent, REC.709, Bright and User, plus ISF Day and Night modes. Honestly, there's not a great deal of difference between them, with the exception of Bright, which should be avoided. Standard and Movie

> 'When Leia is blown free from her ship, debris is cleanly delineated against the backdrop of space'

are good go-to choices. The Silent mode is literally that. For a home cinema projector this option is almost too good to be true. The image loses a certain amount of brightness and visual snap, but for *A Quiet Place* on Blu-ray, it's a price worth paying. Operating noise in other modes isn't much of a concern either, although the PJ was prone to a sporadic squeal (which was a little disconcerting).

The projector supports HDR10 (and defaults to a single image preset option, named HDR). It's worth reiterating that HDR on a home cinema PJ is a different visual ball game to HDR on a TV display, not least because the hardware lacks the ability to project high brightness peaks. It's more about management of average picture brightness to favour highlights, which tends to darken the rest of the frame. To this end, HDR is variable (1-4) in the menus, with the frame getting ever brighter the higher you increment the setting. HDR 3 and 4 completely wash out the picture.

Rated at 2,400 Lumens (and dropping to 1,760 in Eco lamp mode), the V6820i isn't really bright enough to shine in ambient light, and wouldn't cut the mustard in a media room. It needs a full black-out environment to look punchy.

The projector doesn't do absolute black, but there's enough contrast to make the space battles in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (UHD Blu-ray) look appropriately vivid. Sparks and explosions have impact.

When Leia is blown free from her ship and then Forces her way back in, debris is cleanly delineated against the backdrop of space. Expanses of shadow can look hollow though, as the projector's black level limitations are exposed.

Of course, with 4K DLP projectors what goes on beneath the hood is almost as interesting as what happens on screen. DLP models use visual sleight of hand to deliver their 4K image.

The V6820i employs Texas Instruments' XPR (eXpanded Pixel Resolution) 0.47in DMD, which switches two million mirrors four times in the blink of an eye (approx.) to display an 8.3m-pixel picture. It's partnered with a six-segment RGBRGB colour wheel, which covers 100 per cent of the REC.709 colour space. REC.2020 colour info on UHD Blu-rays is downconverted.

We've now seen a variety of these DLP solutions, and they tend to give different results. The V6820i is probably the least convincing of all the DLP 4K models I've auditioned, in so much as it is unable to display a 3,840 x 2,160 test pattern cleanly – an assortment of flickering artefacts over fine detail were noted. However, these flibbles really don't manifest themselves onscreen. Content never looked less than sharp, and image clarity can be safely regarded as 'better than Full HD'.

The V6820i's media player is a little hit and miss. While WMV, MOV and MPEG files all unspooled correctly, MKVs played without audio.

DLP loves the dark

Amazon Alexa distraction aside, the Acer V6820i is an entertaining home cinema projector. It's well equipped, although arguably doesn't perform quite as well as Optoma's UHD51 [see *HCC* #287], with which it shares many similarities. But as a high-end display it acquits itself well in dark room situations. Having two 4K inputs is welcome, and the Silent image preset is a boon ■



SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter ***4K:*** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 ***HDR:*** Yes. HDR10 ***CONNECTIONS:*** 2 x HDMI inputs; PC VGA input; optical digital audio output; 12V trigger; powered USB; RS-232; Ethernet ***BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):*** 2,400 Lumens ***CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):*** 10,000:1 ***ZOOM:*** 1.3x ***DIMENSIONS:*** 398(w) x 127(h) x 297.5(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 5.5kg

FEATURES: XPR single-chip DLP; 2 x 5W built-in audio; lamp life rated at 4,000 hours (Normal), 10,000 hours (Economy), 15,000 hours (ExtremeEco); 25dB fan noise; AcuMotion processing; ColourPurity; 1.21-1.59:1 throw ratio; manual zoom/focus; works with Amazon Alexa

PARTNER WITH



AMAZON ECHO DOT: One of the most affordable options for sampling the Acer PJ's voice control functionality is Amazon's smallscale speaker. The Dot (£35) offers reasonable sound quality, but can connect to other speakers via Bluetooth or 3.5mm

1. **As well as a backlit remote, the Acer offers on-body control keys**

2. **Use the powered USB port to hookup a streaming dongle**

HCC VERDICT ★★★★½

Acer V6820i

→ £1,500 → www.acer.com

WE SAY: Alexa integration is nothing to shout home about, but as a low-cost 4K home cinema projector this glossy Acer is worth a closer look.

Music maestro

Mark Craven enlists the help of Ozzy Osbourne to put Dynaudio's mid-tier wireless multiroom speaker – the Music 3 – through its paces



AT THE RISK of upsetting those who were actually alive in the late 1960s/early '70s, my favourite Black Sabbath track is *God is Dead?*, a rolling, philosophical blues/metal epic found on the band's final album, 2013's *13*. I mention this because it was during a fulsome, energetic and accomplished presentation of that track by Dynaudio's Music 3 speaker that I began toying with the idea of buying one, until I remembered I don't have £575 going spare.

That figure, when you look at the rest of the wireless, multiroom speaker market, is very premium for what is a relatively small unit, and one that's two rungs off the top of Dynaudio's Music series ladder. Yet the Music 3 certainly has the performance and style to carry it off.

An angular, fabric-wrapped model measuring 40cm across, the speaker is better suited to a worktop or office than the gigantic, HDMI-equipped Music 7 [see *HCC* #287]. It's also less tech-savvy, making do with twin tweeters and a 5in woofer, a claimed 3 x 40W power plant, and just 3.5mm by way of a physical input (okay, there's also a USB for music playback from iOS devices). Like all Music models, it offers Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connection, the ability to set presets (which could be a 'net radio station, playlist or artist), compatibility with Dynaudio's Music app, and NoiseAdapt and RoomAdapt EQ modes. Unlike the Music 7 and Music 5, this smaller model also packs an onboard battery, for portable use.

The Music app uses a playful Q&A-style walk-through process and an excellent system of building up your Music profile. Select a favourite band/artist from its initial list, and the list repopulates with myriad related options. This then uses the app's integrated streaming services (currently only Tidal – you get a free nine-month trial) to create a continuous playlist based on your preferences. It's a neat feature, backed up by a smart algorithm that doesn't throw up too many odd choices.

I did come a cropper when trying to pair the app to the Music 3 speaker, though. Even with the Wi-Fi setup light blinking (and after resetting a few times), the app couldn't locate it. Nor did the in-app troubleshooting help; I had to go online to find out how to manually assign the Music 3 to my own Wi-Fi network.

Once done, I was ready to (rock 'n') roll, but did still experience some app shutdowns/freezes. Maybe my Android 'phone isn't posh enough...

Deliciously deep

As you'd expect from the asking price, the Music 3's performance is a cut above much of the wireless speaker market, something that's rammed home by its nuanced low-frequency delivery. While more basic models often sound thick and unsubtle, this unit showcases an assured grip of the fluid basslines of Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Susie Q*, and drops deliciously deep when faced with Nelly's rap classic *Country Grammar*. Bass has weight and believability, and the RoomAdapt feature is excellent here at reducing any unwanted boominess caused by less-than-optimal speaker placement.

Additionally, the Music 3 is transparent enough to convey the intricacies of recordings, such as the way John Fogerty's second-verse vocal in *Susie Q* appears to have been recorded from inside a tiny box. Creedence's *Run Through the Jungle* highlights the compact speaker's stereo field, with handclaps and percussion staged noticeably left and right.

Above all, this speaker pleases with its balance and good dynamics. The percussive drama of Dire Straits' *Telegraph Road* is delivered with purposeful impact, while the track's varied instrumentation poses it no problems. The opening keyboards have an eerie resonance; Knopfler's trademark Fender sound rings clear during the climactic solo. Only if pushed very loud does the Music 3 have trouble retaining its smoothness and clarity.

App niggles aside, it's highly impressive ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Premium portable wireless multiroom speaker

POSITION: Below Dynaudio's non-portable Music 5 and Music 7 models

PEERS: Bluesound Pulse 2; Denon HEOS 7

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 1in tweeters; 1 x 5in woofer ***AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):*** 120W ***CONNECTIONS:*** USB input; 3.5mm input ***AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:*** FLAC, WAV, AIFF, AAC, MP3 ***DIMENSIONS:*** 405(w) x 220(h) x 143(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 3.7kg

FEATURES: Rechargeable battery (rated eight hours); RoomAdapt mode; NoiseAdapt mode; Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; remote control; control via Music app; Tidal integration; presets; Movie/Music/Speech EQ

Dark grey, light grey and red finishes are also available

HCC VERDICT ★★★★½

Dynaudio Music 3
→ £575 → www.dynaudio.com

WE SAY: Superb sound quality and a stylish (portable) design make this one to audition – unless you're put off by the price.

FOCAL®
LISTEN BEYOND

300 SERIES



SOURCE D'INSPIRATION...

*Au-delà du son



MADE IN FRANCE

FOCAL I 300 SERIES

Add a new dimension to your music with the new 300 Series from Focal. This discreet, ingenious French design offers simple tool-free installation across a versatile range of high performance products for stereo, multi-channel and home cinema environments. Thanks to patented 'Flax' technology drivers and an adjustable aluminium/magnesium inverted dome tweeter, the 300 Series offers a unique and uncoloured listening experience that will give your home a whole new atmosphere.

Simplified integration by excellence

Focal U.K. - Southampton Road, Salisbury, SP1 2LN - 01722 426600 -

www.focal.com/300series



Small, but bigger

REL's new Serie HT dedicated home cinema subwoofer range gets a big boost with a big brother. **Richard Stevenson** meets the 500W, 12in HT/1205

YOU COULD HEAR a sharp intake of breath from subwoofer aficionados when REL announced its home theatre-centric HT series (or, rather, Serie HT, to give it its full pretentious moniker). Gone was the signature REL high-level input, long considered a USP of the brand's product stable. So what was on offer? A simple filter network, a budget finish and a promise to deliver a big bang for very few bucks. It was a great idea, and nearly enough for me not to mention that it should have been called the Home Cinema series, or Serie HC. Oops, I mentioned it.

I rather liked the entry-level HT/1003 [reviewed in *HCC* #286). At just £500, its punchy 300W Class D amplifier, 10in CarbonGlas cone woofer and compact sealed cabinet brought home the value LFE bacon.

Scaling up the design into a larger cabinet, boosting power to 500W and deploying a 12in driver is an obvious step up. This is what REL has done with its HT/1205, which comes to the table at just £700, making for a very attractive spec sheet for the money.

Cubism

Tipping the scales at just shy of 20kg, the HT/1205 is no lightweight for a near 40cm cube, thanks to the heavyweight cabinet construction and bold (forward-firing) driver. Its cubic shape, textured vinyl wrap and shiny top-plate make for a serious yet understated aesthetic. That top-plate is a neat nod to RELs of old and, unlike my old Stentor, this panel is fixed so won't leap off during moments of huge LFE.

On the underside, the sub's four MDF feet are threaded for spikes. Given how much my HT/1205 sample shipped itself across a smooth floor without them, spikes or rubber pads will be essential.

Custom designed by REL, the 12in CarbonGlas cone is said to be super-light and super-rigid. Those are the magic ingredients for fast transient attack and a tight sound. The soft butyl rubber roll-surround is a REL hallmark, offering long-throw excursion while remaining flexible for donkey's years.

The sealed cabinet design adds back-pressure to the cone movement, further keeping the output drum-tight but lacking the port-assisted bass gain of open designs. That is overcome by throwing power at the problem.

The 500W Class D amplifier here is also a REL design, dubbed NextGen5, and said to be cool-running and compact enough to allow for plenty of internal cabinet volume. The upshot is a claimed 22Hz (-6dB) frequency response and the ability to go party-loud. 'Warn the neighbours,' suggests the company.

Compared to more traditional RELs, the HT/1205's rear panel looks near-deserted. There are just two switches

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
12in, 500W sealed cabinet subwoofer

POSITION:
Above REL's HT/1003, below the T7i

PEERS:
KEF Kube12b; REL T7i; Elipson Prestige Facet SUB10

(On/Off/Standby, and 180-degree phase), and knobs for level and crossover. Inputs are just two phonos with unfiltered loopthrough, although REL's funky little HT-Air unit will give you wireless connectivity for a further £100. You could use the HT/1205 as a stereo music sub connecting the twin phonos to an amplifier pre-out but that would be rather missing the point.

Simple setup

Setting up the HT/1205 isn't all that different from most REL subwoofers save that lack of a high-level connection and the potential for a simultaneous input. Using a single LFE cable, I moved the sub around (the relatively compact design is useful here) while playing music material with a constant bass beat, settling on the position and phase that delivered the most perceived gain.

> 'Gunfire thumps into your chest with a percussive feel and the subwoofer never seems to lose its grip'

Peering down the back of the HT/1205 reveals the connection and control legends are also written upside-down to make them easier to read. Given I need glasses and a torch to see any legends these days, that touch was rather lost on me, but it shows an attention to detail.

My only criticism of the very manual setup is the smooth finished knobs for level and crossover. If they had an indent or raised line to mark where set, you could better 'feel' where they were pointing. A remote control (or smartphone app) would be even better, but would have bumped the price up well above £700.

Cutting to the chase (scene), the HT/1205 delivers an astonishing level of home cinema thunder for the money. If you want big LFE without dipping into four-figure sub territory, this is a smart place to look (and I suspect a pair of HT/1205s, for £1,400, would be frankly seismic and deliver giant-killing fun). On the flip side, the HT/1205 was clearly playing hooky the day the subtlety circuits were being handed out.

With Scarlett Johansson diving into the Dolby Atmos-fuelled festival opening fight sequence in *Ghost in the Shell*, (Blu-ray), the HT/1205 is in its element. Gunfire thumps into your chest with a percussive feel and the subwoofer never seems to lose its grip even at serious volumes. My main speakers went into HF compression long before the HT/1205 was done, inspiring some enthusiastically LFE-biased level-matching on my AV rig. That in itself naturally led to seeking out *The Expendables 3* on Blu-ray.

I just love the scene in the dockyard when our heroes see Stonebanks (Mel Gibson) for the first time. Gunfire from ten different types of weapon (including a rocket launcher), explosions and toppling cargo containers see the LFE channel on fire and the HT/1205 does not disappoint. It is fearsomely dynamic with a sledgehammer punch around 50Hz-60Hz that can take your breath away. It revels in the mayhem, keeping taught rather than boomy and delivering bass fun in spades. Job done.

Yet the escape sequence in *Skyfall* (Blu-ray) shows up the HT/1205 as a little, well, gung-ho for subtler effects. The low bass beat throughout the beginning of the scene is designed to replicate Bond's rising heartbeat as he realises Silva has escaped. By the time Craig is running through the tube station, the beat is a fast-tempo rhythm. Here, the HT/1205 lacks the refinement of woofers like REL's own T7i [see *HCC* #277] and the LFE is a little more 'one-note' than ideal. Backing down the gain softens the effect, but also robs the HT/1205 of some of its visceral edge when the action starts.



Bass-making bargain

Perhaps I'm guilty here of demanding too much. Despite its absence of true LFE subtlety, there should be no doubt that the HT/1205 is a bass-making bargain, and it offers a notable upgrade over the smaller HT/1003 for just £200 more – that model doesn't go as deep or loud, but is a little easier to integrate into a more compact movie room. And, anyway, this is home cinema and we like it big, bold, loud and not too expensive. REL's HT/1205 fits that billing nicely ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in CarbonGlas long-throw bass driver ***ENCLOSURE:*** Sealed ***FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):*** Down to 22Hz (-6dB) ***ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):*** 500W Class D amplifier ***REMOTE CONTROL:*** No ***DIMENSIONS:*** 376(w) x 405(h) x 399(d)mm ***WEIGHT:*** 19.2kg

FEATURES: 2 x LFE line-level inputs/2 x loopthrough outputs; 180-degree phase switch; automatic standby option; compatible with REL HT-Air Wireless transmitter; NextGen5 amplification; feet threaded for spikes

PARTNER WITH



REL HT-AIR WIRELESS: This compact £100 add-on removes the need for a cable run between the HT/1205 and your AVR, enabling better placement for both sonics and aesthetics. REL claims it transmits with a super-low (16-20ms) latency.

1. **For this larger Serie HT model, REL has used a 12in CarbonGlas driver**

2. **Back-plate legends are repeated upside-down, so you can read them when peering over the top...**

HCC VERDICT

★★★★½

REL HT/1205

→ £700 → www.rel.net

WE SAY: Enormously powerful for the cash, REL's neat-looking HT/1205 delivers outstanding bang per buck, but don't expect too much subtlety.

Lithe Audio LWF1

A wireless all-in-one in-ceiling speaker sounds like a great idea, says **Steve May**



The speaker claims 2 x 30W of onboard power

MOST IN-CEILING SPEAKERS are dumb. They typically connect to multiroom amplifiers or AV receivers via physical wire, and provide discreet audio in either a dedicated theatre or around the home. This architectural speaker is rather different – the LWF1 is an all-in-one Wi-Fi solution (it only operates in the 2.4GHz range) designed primarily for streaming sources, and works with Apple Airplay.

Build quality is impressive. It's an open-back design, although both the amplifier module and Wi-Fi chipset are fully enclosed. A stereo phono aux input is provided for wired sources.

The speaker's 6.5in polypropylene cone, with central titanium tweeter, is protected by a circular metallic grille to blend in with your decor. A cutting guide for the 210mm hole you'll need to cut is provided. Fixing is via screw-out doglegs. The speaker comes with a power brick; alternatively an electrician could run it from a lighting circuit. For stereo playback, you'll need to team this master speaker with a passive slave. Lithe Audio offers such a stereo bundle for £400.

Setup is via the Lithe Audio app. This allows you to manage single rooms, groups of speakers or all-in party mode, and supports the usual streaming services, including Tunein and Spotify. The speaker is also DLNA compliant, and works with a range of file formats, including MP3, AAC, FLAC and WAV.

The onboard amp is rated at 60W total (2 x 30W into 8 Ohms) and it certainly has poke. However, this isn't a speaker I'd relish listening to. It's sharp to the point of being prickly, with a mid-range performance that underwhelms. It lacks the musicality you might hope for and seems suited to transitory listening, perhaps in a corporate environment. I love the idea of a Wi-Fi ceiling speaker, though ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Lithe Audio LWF1
➜ £330 ➜ www.litheaudio.com

WWW.DEEZER.COM/£20 (PER MONTH SUBSCRIPTION)

Deezer Hi-Fi

Mark Craven weighs up the pros and cons of the streaming platform's top-tier package

MUSIC-ON-DEMAND OUTFIT DEEZER has gone one better than its main rival Spotify by offering a Hi-Fi tier that streams using 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC – essentially CD quality – and is making a play for your cinema system with integrated support in Pioneer and Onkyo receivers, Samsung soundbars, Yamaha MusicCast hardware and more, including Chromecast/Google devices.



The entry price for this higher-quality (but not hi-res, *a la* Tidal and Qobuz) service is £19.99 a month. Other Deezer plans available are Premium+ (£9.99), Family (£14.99) and a free (but featuring advertisements) model. Note that the Hi-Fi tier isn't supported directly from Deezer's mobile app, but is via Chromecast. Nor can you yet 'cast' FLAC via Deezer's desktop app, which would be useful.

As with its rivals, Deezer's library is large (the company claims 53m tracks) and doesn't have any obvious holes. Operation will be familiar to anyone who has had an account with Spotify, Tidal etc. You can create playlists, add favourite artists, or let Deezer's own algorithm, 'Flow', stream a selection based on your preferences – I found this got better over time. Tracks can be downloaded for offline use. The app/desktop interfaces are well-designed, but not much different from rivals.

How much benefit you get from Deezer's higher-quality streams will depend on your setup. Those with a PC/DAC/headphone system will reap rewards that budget smart speaker users won't – that £20 per month fee can only be considered worthwhile if you've invested in the hi-fi to make the most of this Hi-Fi option. Still, as Deezer continues to expand its supported product base, you may find yourself giving it a spin ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Deezer Hi-Fi
➜ £20 (per month) ➜ www.deezer.com

PHILIPS

Television

OLED 803

Elegant off.
Mesmerizing on.

New Philips OLED 803.

www.philips.com/tv

EISA AWARD **Best Product** 2018-2019
BEST BUY OLED TV
Philips 55OLED803



Philips OLED TV.
Looks better.

OLED ambilight P5 Perfect Picture Engine

MUSICAL IMAGES
EDGWARE • BECKENHAM

SALE

EX-DISPLAY SALE AT BECKENHAM
CHECK ON MUSICALIMAGES.CO.UK/SHOP
FOR ONE OFF BARGAINS



THE BEST IN HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Whatever you're looking for, from a radio or headphones to the very latest TVs, Home Entertainment systems and Home Automation installations, Musical Images is a trusted, local expert you can rely on. For the finest brands, caring service and true expertise there's no better choice for your entertainment.
Come in and see us soon.

HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY

Musical Images Showrooms Opening times 9.30am - 5.30am. Monday - Saturday. Closed on Wednesdays

126 High Street, Beckenham
Kent BR3 1EB
Tel: 020 866 33 777
beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

173 Station Road, Edgware
Middlesex HA8 7JX
Tel: 020 8952 5535
edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

www.musical-images.co.uk
musical images
@musical_images

3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE

iCUBED HOME CINEMA

01702 520804 / 07864 075693
www.icubedhomecinema.co.uk

Multi-Award Winning Bespoke Cinema Rooms & Family Entertainment Spaces Throughout Essex, Kent & Surrounding Areas





SMART BUILDING AWARDS WINNER 2018
BEST CINEMA PROJECT



Cinema & Media Rooms / Smart Home Automation / Lighting / Design - Visualisation - Install

CEDIA MEMBER



Digital Copy

A relieved **Mark Craven** discovers that we've been moaning about awful dialogue and distracting special effects since the earliest days of cinema

THOSE WITH AN interest in film criticism, and movie history in general, will find a lot to enjoy in new book *The Times On Cinema*. Edited by Brian Pendreigh, it collects nearly 100 years of cinema writing from both *The Times* and *Sunday Times* newspapers, and I've found it utterly fascinating.

Obviously, much is made of the way that opinions on movies change over time – early examples given include a 1947 review of *It's A Wonderful Life* ('Not a very good film') and a 1999 piece on *Fight Club*, which says the Edward Norton/Brad Pitt thriller 'starts out like a winner but fades fast.' I actually agree on that last one.

There's poster art to savour here, plus lengthy lists (James Bond films, cult movies) and isolated articles on everything from video nasties to the proposed plot of *Gladiator 2*.

Yet where the book really tickled my fancy is the contemporary writings on *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), an early standard bearer for three-strip Technicolor, and *The Jazz Singer* (1927, pictured), the first feature-length talkie. The latter, in particular, heralded a momentous change in the nature of cinema – much more important, I'd argue, than anything that's been announced as a revolution since (3D, digital projection, D-BOX...), with the possible exception of surround sound. So what did the uncredited *Times* reviewer make of this new-fangled art form? They weren't keen.

Sure, the writer applauds *The Jazz Singer*'s technological ability – 'synchronization has been almost perfectly achieved,' we're told – but follows it with gripes that will be familiar to all of us.

The Jazz Mumbler

Firstly, Al Jolson's dialogue is deemed toneless, and a 'faint parody of the human voice.' While no doubt a by-product of the delivery mechanisms of the time (the Academy Curve, which standardised soundtracks and was designed to reduce the high-frequency harshness of the industry's mono mixes, didn't come into play for another 10 years), it's quaint to see that people were moaning about unconvincing, unintelligible film dialogue many, many decades before the likes of *Batman v Superman* and *Interstellar* set cinemagoers into a frenzy.

More interestingly, the *Times* scribe found the mere addition of (low-quality) dialogue a distraction from the onscreen action, and a detriment to the 'subtlety of acting.' It's an odd way to look at it, but I've realised I see where they are coming from. **How many of your favourite movies feature dialogue-free scenes**, where incessant, plot-developing chit-chat is binned in favour of letting only images (and a well-crafted soundtrack) push the story forward?

As for the colour- and SFX-rich *...Wizard of Oz,* the analysis here is so wonderful that I'll repeat it in full: 'The scenery and dresses are designed with no more taste than is commonly used in the decoration of a night-club. The film is, no doubt, a triumph of technical dexterity and especially of skill in colour photography, but what is the use of making a hollyhock out of cellophane, painting it an ugly colour, and then photographing it with complete accuracy?'

Well, quite. I'd never before considered MGM's fantasy epic as a gaudy exercise in OTT movie-making, whose story is ruined by a director (actually, five of them) more interested in showing off the tech toys of the day, but now I'll always think of it as a precursor to *Avatar* ■

Has a movie ever been ruined by its SFX? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Mark Craven admits that he may have found *Fight Club* over-rated because he simply wasn't clever enough to understand it



Film Fanatic

It's been over four decades since *Jaws* first hit cinemas, so why do filmmakers still find it difficult to unleash a good killer shark movie, wonders **Anton van Beek**?

I'M QUITE OFTEN in the mood for some fishy film fun and the past month found Hollywood doubling down with new shark flicks aiming to take a bite out of the home entertainment market (*Deep Blue Sea 2*) and cinema audiences (*The Meg*). Yet after watching them both I have been left feeling a little disheartened.

To get to the reason why we have to wind back the clock to the Summer of 1975 when Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* swam into cinemas and terrified audiences all over the world. I didn't get the chance to experience the film on its initial release because I was only a year old at the time. But I've more than made up for that with the countless times I have enjoyed it on TV, VHS, DVD and Blu-ray.

Of course, I loved *Jaws* as a kid for its scares above all else (Ben Gardner's severed head was the talk of the playground), but over the years I've come to appreciate its myriad other facets; recognising it as the perfectly crafted cinematic thrill-ride it is.

Indeed, as far as I'm concerned, *Jaws* isn't just Spielberg's best film. It's one of the best films ever made, full-stop.

It's therefore annoying that the movie-making industry has continually struggled, from 1975 to the present day, to craft another shark movie that quickens the pulse in the same way. With the sheer number being churned out (particularly in the last decade or so) you'd think the law of averages would mean something would come close to measuring up to Spielberg's classic shocker.

But no. As somebody who has spent years watching more shark movies than any sane person would ever attempt, I can attest that hardly any of them even meet the quality threshold of *Jaws 2*. A few swim around the same level as *Jaws 3-D* (entertaining in a trashy sort of way); the vast majority are cinematic bottom-feeders on a par with franchise killer *Jaws: The Revenge*. Admittedly, a lot have no aim beyond being gimmicky dross. But discount the *Sharknado*, *Mega Shark*, *Ghost Shark* and *Sharktopus* franchises, and one-off efforts like *Jersey Shore Shark Attack*, *Shark in Venice* and *Santa Jaws* (a shark with a Santa hat on its dorsal fin), and those left are still pretty toothless.

Few man-eating shark movies (apart from *Jaws*) demonstrate even the most basic understanding of how to create and sustain a sense of tension. And if you're hoping for engaging characters and acting pitched somewhere above the level of a primary school nativity play, then you're limited to a list that runs about as deep as *Deep Blue Sea*, *Open Water*, *The Reef*, *The Shallows* and *47 Metres Down*.

Size doesn't matter, 4K does

Which brings me back around to *Deep Blue Sea 2* and *The Meg*. The former is a DTV sequel – enough to set alarm bells ringing – and, sure enough, it's every bit the cheap and lousy retread of the original you'd expect. With the latter, however, things are a bit different. It's a pretty fun film in a leave-your-brain-at-the-door *Jaws 3-D* sort of way. The real disappointment here is that it's easy to see how it could have been so much better, had the filmmakers had the courage to take the idea more seriously.

The one thing *The Meg* does have over *Jaws*, however, is that before the year is out we'll be able to watch Jason Statham punch a giant shark on Ultra HD Blu-ray – a situation that would soon be rectified if Universal would just pull its finger out and give Spielberg's masterpiece the 4K release fans are clamouring for ■

Are there any good shark movies Anton might have missed? Let him know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Anton van Beek left his brain at the door when he went to watch *Death Wish 4* in 1987. Unfortunately he forgot to pick it up afterwards

Home Cinemas • Home Automation & Control • TV, Audio & WiFi Distribution • Lighting

Full Design & Installation



KENT home cinema

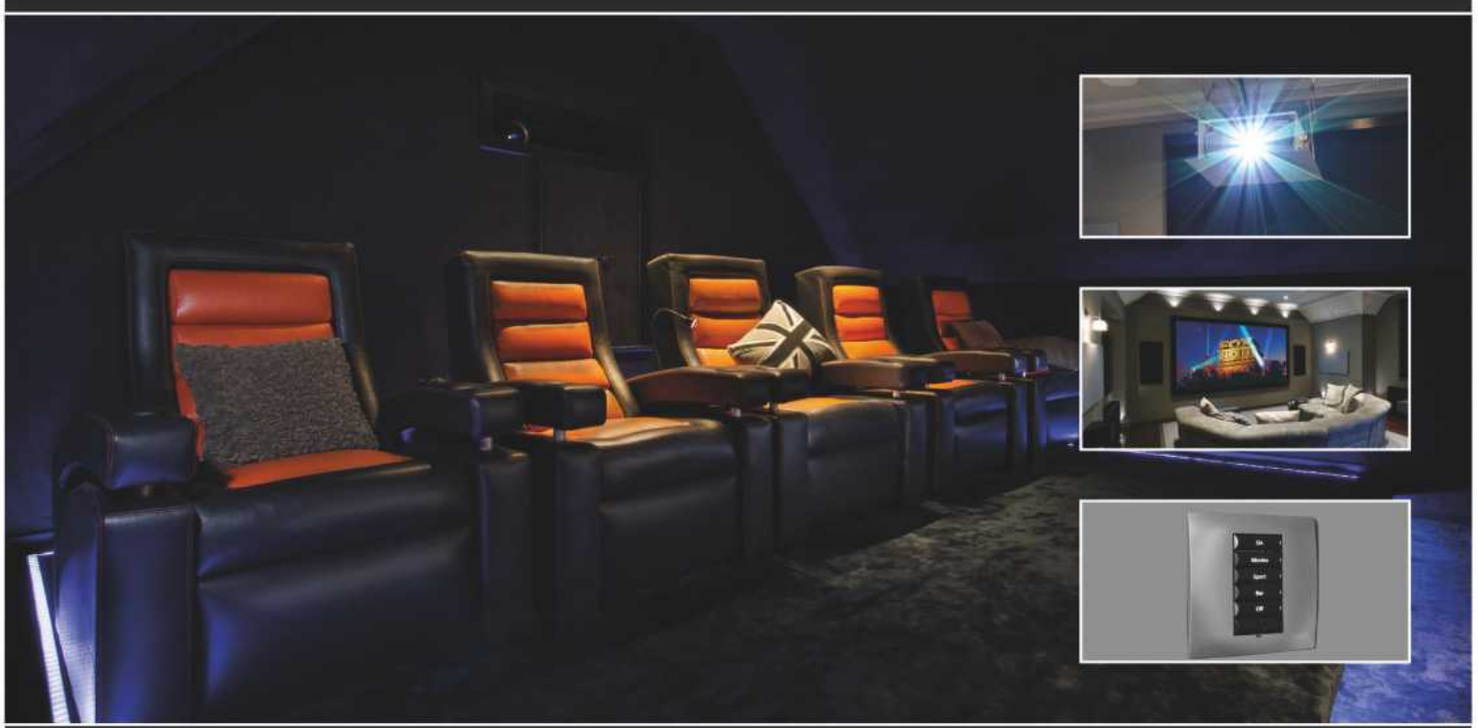
www.KentHomeCinema.co.uk

01892 535007

CEDIA CUSTOM ELECTRONIC DESIGN & INSTALLATION ASSOCIATION

An uncompromising approach to Home Cinema

Home Cinema ▪ Home Automation ▪ Music ▪ Lighting ▪ HVAC ▪ Custom Design & Installations



PROGRESSIVE HOME TECHNOLOGY

www.progressive-ht.com

01892 860801

CEDIA MEMBER



In The Mix

This month **Jon Thompson** is having a rant about the Academy Awards, but will no doubt be back to ranting about 4K Blu-ray and HDR in the next issue...

IS ELITISM BAD? As in, striving to be the best, and being selected by your peers as the best? When I started out in this industry more years ago than I care to remember, becoming a member of BAFTA, the British Society of Cinematographers (BSC), the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) or – the big one – The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was the dream everyone had. After a lot of hard work and graft (any independent producer can tell you the pain you go through to get a film onto the screen), those who made the grade were accepted into these hallowed halls where gods that we admired and studied had once trod.

The public may think the Oscars are a jolly for film stars, dressing up and getting their red-carpet photo seen all over the world. To me and everyone else involved in the industry, they're an acknowledgement of the hell filmmakers go through, just so people can munch noisy food, sip buckets of liquid sugar and fiddle with their phones while not watching the film properly, and then denounce it as rubbish.

This is why the industry created awards: to slap its participants on the back and enjoy the recognition of their peers. It's also, admittedly, about creating a unique marketing opportunity for films that normally don't get recognised. ***Star Wars* needs no extra public awareness**. Films like *Moonlight* do, even if its Best Picture award was mistakenly given to *La La Land*.

As fellow filmmakers, we can appreciate the effort put in by a cinematographer, or the art department, or the hair and makeup crew. I chatted with director Yann Demange after a screening of his stunning film *'71*, and told him I was impressed with the detail and rhythm in the background action. He was chuffed I'd noticed, and explained he had worked for years as a second assistant director (AD), and then a first AD, jobs that are all about the background and making a scene look real. This led to the obligatory joke about David Tomlin, considered the greatest first AD of all time, and his direction to the 200,000 extras while filming the funeral scene in *Ghandi*: 'Gandhi is dead! Look sad!'

My point here is the industry knows the industry, so the Academy announcing it is changing its awards and creating an 'Outstanding Achievement in Popular Film' category, to help regain public interest in its awards and its live TV broadcast, is irritating. It's a desperate move that no one in the industry wants, as is the plan to not announce some of the awards live on the night to reduce the programme's running time. They are going to move the date forward, too, which is something I actually agree with, as it's now so late at the end of February it seems like an also-ran.

(Also, hours of jokes about President Trump are a major turn off. The Oscars is not the place to discuss politics, it's about giving people awards for their hard work. It's also very hard to make jokes about Trump as it is, as he does a great job of his own self-parody).

So I don't think these film-focused organisations need to be opened up and run to please the whims of TV viewers. They are ultimately for their members, who deserve the recognition. Look at other awards which are voted for by the public, and you'll find it's always the high-concept popcorn films that win. Is there really much evaluation of the quality elements that go into making a movie?

Elitism based on achievement has its place in the industry. It's a way of driving quality. If you keep looking for the lowest common denominator, don't be that surprised with what you get ■

Do you make an effort to watch Oscar-winning films? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at @johnnyfocal

MAIN IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/FEATUREFLASH PHOTO AGENCY

- STORES NATIONWIDE
- DEMONSTRATION ROOMS
- EXPERT IMPARTIAL ADVICE
- UNRIVALLED PRODUCT RANGE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION

OFFERING THE VERY BEST SOUND, VISION AND SERVICE FOR OVER 45 YEARS







ONLINE
www.ssav.com

INSTORE
stores nationwide

SMARTHOME
www.ssav.com/smarthome

NEW



SONOS BEAM £399.00

Compact Smart Soundbar with Amazon Alexa voice control

Experience incredible sound while streaming music, watching TV and movies, enjoying podcasts and audiobooks, or playing video games. With easy voice control, five far-field microphones detect your voice from any direction, anywhere in the room, even when the music is blasting. At only 25.6 inches long, Sonos Beam won't hang off furniture, block the TV or overwhelm your space. With just two cords, simply plug Sonos Beam into power and then connect it to your TV using the HDMI cord.

NEW

Works with SONOS



PIONEER VSX-LX503 £999.00

9.2-Channel Network AV Receiver

The VSX-LX503 is capable of handling Dolby Atmos and DTS:X soundtracks in 5.2.4 or 7.2.2 configurations. Connectivity is comprehensive - its six rear HDMI inputs are 4K/HDR10/Dolby Vision-compatible while the HDMI front connection is HDCP2.2-compliant. Chromecast is built-in along with DTS Play-Fi, AirPlay and Bluetooth. The `LX503 will seamlessly tie into Sonos, instantly waking, changing inputs and playing at the volume you command through the familiar Sonos app.

NEW



YAMAHA RX-A1080 £1299.00

7.2-Channel Network AV Receiver

7.2-channel AV receiver with Dolby Atmos and DTS:X support. Features include MusicCast streaming, opening doors to DLNA streaming of files up to 24-bit/192kHz and playback from Spotify, Tidal, Qobuz and Deezer - over 2.4GHz or 5GHz wi-fi or Ethernet. Bluetooth, AirPlay are included and, for owners of an Amazon Alexa speaker, voice commands. MusicCast Surround enables Yamaha's new MusicCast 20 or 50 wireless speakers to be used as rear channels.

SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 20/09/2018. E&OE

click & collect

PaybyFinance

www.ssav.com

£2699



ARCAM • FMJ AVR550 • AV RECEIVER

Dolby Atmos 7.1.4 capable AV receiver that is equally at home with high resolution surround sound or two-channel music.

Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR390 & FMJ AVR850

£1299



NAD • T 758 V3 • AV RECEIVER

Dolby Atmos and BluOS enabled AV receiver with Hi-Res audio playback and 4K Ultra HD full support.

Also Available: NAD T 777 V3

£5199



SONY • VPL-VW260ES • 4K SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.

£SSAV.COM

Chromecast built-in



SONY • STR-DN1080 • AV RECEIVER

With flexible speaker solutions, DTS:X and Dolby Atmos support, the STR-DN1080 delivers mighty, cinematic surround sound.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A880

NEW

£2199

MusicCast



YAMAHA • RX-A3080 • AV RECEIVER

9.2-channel receiver MusicCast, Dolby Atmos and DTS:X support, along with Spotify, Bluetooth, AirPlay.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1080

NEW

£1499



OPTOMA • UHD51 • 4K DLP PROJECTOR

Packed with the latest technology and features, this compact UHD projector boasts HDR compatibility, HDCP 2.2 support and sophisticated PureMotion frame-interpolation processing.

BLUESOUND • PULSE SOUNDBAR

Not only does the PULSE SOUNDBAR not require a subwoofer to get full natural sound, but it also includes BluOS, Bluesound's powerful wireless multi-room streaming music app, it's also an all-in-one music system that rivals many high-end audio systems.



£799 New White Finish £899

MQA TIDALMASTERS

£SSAV.COM



Q ACOUSTICS • M2 • SOUNDBASE

Delivers stunning TV and audio sound performance from its 80w amplifier, unique BMR™ wide dispersion sound technology and built in subwoofer.

FOCAL • SIB EVO DOLBY ATMOS 5.1.2 SPEAKER PACKAGE

Enjoy Atmos sound effects worthy of cinemas, and created by Dolby, when watching your favourite films at home. Your films will take on a new dimension!

DOLBY ATMOS



NEW £1099

NEW £399



SONOS • BEAM SOUNDBAR WITH AMAZON ALEXA VOICE CONTROL

Experience incredible sound while streaming music, watching TV and movies, enjoying podcasts and audiobooks, or playing video games. With easy voice control, five far-field microphones detect your voice from any direction, anywhere in the room.

SONY • HT-XF9000 SOUNDBAR/SUB

The Sony HT-XF9000 Dolby Atmos Soundbar with Subwoofer features 7.1.2 channels. With the latest 4K HDR 18Gbps pass through and HDCP 2.2, the HT-XF9000 is made for the latest home cinema formats including Dolby Vision, HDR10 and Hybrid Log Gamma.



NEW £449

DOLBY ATMOS

DOLBY ATMOS

£349



PSB • IMAGINE XA • DOLBY ATMOS ENABLED SPEAKERS

Specifically designed to be used as the "elevation" or "height" speaker in a Dolby Atmos system.

Bowers & Wilkins

600 Series 2

EXCLUSIVE OFFERS

683 S2 £799
SAVE £350

685 S2 £349
SAVE £150 (Price excludes stands)

HTM61 S2 £399
SAVE £150

HTM62 S2 £249
SAVE £100



SPECIAL OFFER

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2015
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Stereo speakers
Best standmounter £400-£800
Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Stereo speakers
Best floorstander £600-£1200
Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2

BLACK FINISH

click & collect

PaybyFinance

www.ssav.com

www.ssav.com/smarthome



SAMSUNG NEW QLED TV

QE65Q9FN • 65" 4K UHD TV

Pure colour and the best blacks with Samsung's 2018 Q9F QLED TV. See nothing else. The Q9F combines HDR 2000 and Ultra Black Elite to deliver Samsung's best picture quality to date, a high accolade from the most awarded brand for picture quality 4 years running. Only Samsung QLED technology delivers Certified Ultra HD Premium picture quality with 100% colour volume* displaying over a billion colours that are true-to-life. The Q9F is the ultimate movie screen illuminated with the highest HDR brightness levels contrasted with the deepest blacks.

*100% colour volume measured to DCI-P3 Standard.

Also Available 55 75

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

FOR THE LATEST TV PROMOTIONS AND PRICES VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM



LG OLED TV AI ThinQ

NEW

OLED55C8PLA • 55" OLED 4K UHD TV

Featuring LG's processor α9, an Intelligent Processor - Optimized for OLED TV, this exclusive processor allows for clean and sharp images with accurate colour and even more detailed HDR images. OLED pixels create an astonishingly accurate and wide colour range which is presented on the perfect black background only available from self emitting pixels. LG TV can recognise major High Dynamic Range formats such as HLG, HDR 10, Dolby Vision™ and Technicolor. So you get the HDR experience, no matter what HDR entertainment you're enjoying.

Also Available 65 77 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



SONY NEW

KD-55AF8 • 55" OLED 4K UHD TV

See how Sony's latest OLED screen, processor and sound technologies come together for breathtaking 4K HDR TV entertainment. With over 8 million self-illuminating pixels, you'll see perfect blacks, incredible contrast and authentic colour in a blur-free image, with a wide viewing angle. Exclusive to Sony, specially designed actuators invisibly vibrate the TV panel to create amazing sound coming directly from the screen, for a perfect unification of audio and picture.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K HDR

Also Available 65

NEW



Panasonic 4K PRO HDR

TX-55FZ802 • 55" OLED 4K UHD TV

The FZ802 OLED Series brings Hollywood Grade Picture & Razor Sharp Style to your home. This elegantly designed TV is a picture powerhouse. It combines the peerless contrast capabilities of 4K HDR OLED screen technology with new Studio Colour HCX picture processing that's been tuned by a Hollywood colourist to ensure you always get to see pictures exactly how their creators intended. The FZ802 supports multiple HDR formats, such as HDR10, HDR10+ and Hybrid Log Gamma.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY OLED Also Available 65

SONY NEW

KD-65XF9005 • 65" 4K UHD TV



FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K HDR

Also Available 49 55 75

ULTRA HD Blu-ray NEW £199



SAMSUNG • UBD-M7500 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER

Bring Hollywood to life in your home and discover every detail of your favourite TV shows with a Certified Ultra HD Premium Blu-ray player that's ready to work with the next-generation of content.

ULTRA HD Blu-ray NEW £399



PANASONIC • DP-UB820 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER

The DP-UB820 faithfully reproduces the director's intended images. Unique chroma processing technology maximises the beauty of 4K HDR content.

ULTRA HD Blu-ray NEW £SSAV.COM



SONY • UBP-X700 • 4K UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER

Find yourself at the heart of every movie and series. 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray shows everything in finer detail than ever before, so you feel like you're seeing the real thing.

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

Bristol• 0117 974 3727
Brighton 01273 733338
Bromley 020 8290 1988
Chalfont St Peter• 0845 5046364
Cambridge 01223 304770
Chelsea• 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham• 01242 241171
Epsom• 01372 720720
Exeter• 01392 218895
Guildford 01483 536666
Holborn• 020 7837 7540
Kingston• 020 8547 0717
Loughton 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich• 01603 767605
Nottingham 0115 988 1703
MOVED Oxford 01865 241773
Reading• 01189 477093
Sevenoaks 01732 459555
Solihull 0121 709 0606
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
Wetherby 01937 586886
Witham (Essex) 01376 501733
Yeovil• 01935 700078

NEW STORES OPENING IN 2018

For store details, opening hours and brands stocked visit www.ssav.com

•THESE STORES ARE FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

Read the latest issue of **SEVENOAKS SELECT** digital interactive magazine today!

www.ssav.com/select



Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 20/09/2018. E&OE

SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

Time for a new processor?

Is it worth upgrading from a Marantz AV8802A to the new AV8805? My system comprises B&W 800/804/805 speakers, two DB1 subwoofers and four in-ceiling Atmos speakers (so 7.2.4), with Classe monoblock power amps all round and a Sony 4K projector. I have to say it sounds and views very well indeed, and as I'm 63 years of age the biggest downside to anything is very likely my ears and eyes.

So is it really worth upgrading? Will I notice a difference in any area? My 8802A has all the firmware updates and I'm pleased with it. I'm past upgrading for upgrading sake, so it has to be better.

Allan Whittle



Marantz's AV8805 has 1,890 new components

Richard Stevenson replies: My immediate answer would be no, mainly because you say you're very pleased with the high-end system you already have. But let's look into it in more detail.

The key feature updates to the AV8805 are its 13-channel processing capability, HEOS integration, and e-ARC functionality. The latter is probably of no use in your projector-based setup, and while the HEOS multiroom platform has plenty of strengths, I can't see you wanting to shell out £3,500 just to be able to turn your cinema room into a multiroom audio zone.

You might, however, want to add an extra two speaker channels, whether it's for Dolby Atmos with six overhead channels, or adding front wide/height speakers for a more expansive base soundstage. Of course, in this instance you might think two more Classe monoblock amplifiers (rather than a more affordable power solution) might be in order, so the upgrade becomes even more expensive (not to mention needing extra speakers).

Additionally, Marantz tells me that the AV8805 is in line for an HDMI 2.1 upgrade at some point in its lifetime (the AV8802A isn't). This means eventually it will cater to 8K video, so if you see yourself replacing your Sony 4K PJ with an as-yet unknown 8K model then you might consider that a plus – but it's not a reason to rush out and buy one right now.

Shhh! I'm listening...

Totally agree with the review of the 4K Blu-ray of *A Quiet Place* in the last issue [*HCC* #289]. Along with *Blade Runner 2049* this has one of the best soundmixes I've heard this year, really making the most of the surround field and most importantly knowing when to keep itself 'quiet'. It really adds to the atmosphere of the movie, rather than detracting from it. I can think of plenty of other Hollywood films that could learn a lesson from it!

Matthew, via email

Anton van Beek replies: I wrote about *A Quiet Place*'s masterful sound design after seeing/hearing it at the cinema [see *HCC* #286], so I'm thrilled its Blu-ray Atmos mix continues the good work. As for movie soundtracks that could use a bit of subtlety, the *Transformers* franchise springs to mind. Any other suggestions?


***A Quiet Place*: a sound design lesson for Hollywood?**

More discreet tweaks to the AV8805 over the 8802A concern its under-the-hood components. Marantz's engineering team replaced 1,890 parts in pursuit of improved sound quality, employed a new-generation SHARC DSP chip and redesigned the wiring and power supply layouts (plus other changes).

I've not yet listened to the AV8805, but my colleague Steve Withers was highly impressed [see *HCC* #288], and Jon Thompson reports that it sounds smoother and more cohesive than its predecessor.

Whether that's enough to have you upgrading is your choice. The only way to gauge its sonic improvements in your system would be to try and borrow one from a friendly dealer for an afternoon.

My view on Vue

I am a fan of 3D. Judging by recent letters so are many others. In *HCC* #289 Peter Brennan made a strong case that 3D is not dead. In his reply Mark Craven supported this, saying: 'There's been plenty of investment in 3D projection technologies across the globe, meaning a demand is there for content that multiplexes can charge a premium for.' Having to pay the premium aside, I wish this was the case in my local Vue multiplex in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

I go to the cinema with a bunch of friends and we always seek out the 3D showing of high-profile productions. For years we have happily gone to the Vue, which is in walking distance for us all. But over the last six months or so there seems to have been a notable reduction in 3D showings, despite many years of Vue celebrating their use of RealD 3D tech and their website claiming three of the screens, including a big one, have 3D capability.

The Incredibles 2 only had one 3D showing a day at around midday. We had to give that a miss. Then we looked forward to *Mission Impossible: Fallout*, advertised as 2D, 3D and IMAX on advance posters in the cinema. Not a single 3D showing. Further afield Cineworld had plenty of 3D showings and Odeon a few – but none at all in our local Vue. So in recent months we have had to wait for the 3D Blu-ray.

I emailed Vue Customer Service and asked why Vue had recently stopped showing 3D versions of films, other than for one or two showings on a few days at very odd times. I explained we were unable to see *Solo* in 3D for this reason. The reply was somewhat strange, as it said 3D screenings depend on securing the '3D film roll' (whatever that means in a digital age?) for the venue.

We have a brand-new Cineworld a few miles away and I guess we will now take it >

Star Letter...

What size is my PJ screen?

If someone tells me they bought a 65in TV I know they mean the diagonal measurement. But if they claim to have a 100in projector screen, how big is that? I always thought a screen's size should be measured by its width, not its diagonal. For example, a projector's throw ratio is calculated using the image width in the denominator. And when bodies like THX and SMPTE quote specs for acceptable viewing angles in cinemas, they are again using screen width, not screen diagonals.

I suppose the clearest way to describe screen size is with both width and height since the aspect ratio can vary. But when someone simply states a screen is 100in I suspect they're using the diagonal measurement in order to big it up.

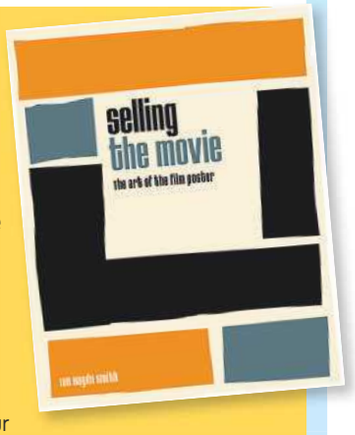
A good example is the recent review of Optoma's HD27E. It uses the spec'd throw ratio of 1.47-1.62:1 to correctly calculate the required viewing distance of 3.25m-3.6m needed to achieve a 100in screen image; but 100in measured diagonally. The screen would only need to be 87in wide to display this image, which obviously doesn't sound quite as impressive.

They say size matters. So when someone asks me about my cinema, should I say the screen is 3m or 2.6m?

Ion

Mark Craven replies: Good question! As we always refer to the diagonal measurement for TVs, it make sense (if someone asks you how big your projector screen is) to also give a diagonal figure, as this is an easier-to-understand comparison – even if 'Scope ratio screen owners will feel short-changed. And this is why the example from the Optoma review in our last issue was given using a diagonal measurement (we've also noticed plenty of screen retailers giving diagonal – rather than width – figures, until you dig deeper into the specs).

But you are right that this could be a cause of confusion, so we'll make sure to highlight any instances where a width figure is given instead – such as the Dream Theatre feature on p34 of this issue.



Star letter-writer Ion grabs a copy of *Selling the Movie: The Art of the Film Poster*. Showcasing the best posters by the top designers in the field, author Ian Hayden Smith's rich visual history explores how the film poster became an artform itself and changed the face of graphic design. The hardback edition of *Selling the Movie: The Art of the Film Poster* is available to buy from September 17, courtesy of White Lion Publishing, priced £25.

Starscape Fibre Optic Lighting
CEDIA MEMBER
* Infinity - modular star ceiling panels for professional installers
* Custom and off-the-shelf DIY fibre optic kits
* Comprehensive website with projects and ideas.
Help and advice from our small team of fibre optic enthusiasts
info@starscape.co.uk www.starscape.co.uk 01289 332900



Photo courtesy of UK Home Cinemas

in turns to drive. We've always enjoyed going to Vue but something in their policy has clearly changed. If the trend continues with other cinema chains then the format really will struggle.
Alan Russell

Jon Thompson replies: While there have been film-based 3D projection systems used in cinemas, I'm certain this isn't the case with your local Vue in 2018, so '3D film roll' may just be a slip of the tongue.

As for why a chain would reduce 3D showings, that's hard to know. No doubt a balance sheet has been looked at (which includes licence costs to 3D tech providers) and a decision made. If your local cinema isn't offering what you want, you will have to take your business elsewhere – and let them know about it, too.

Sony cans conundrum

I have a nice TV/cinema setup (acceptable to my wife with few speakers and wires) consisting of a Sony 49X8505B TV, B&W Panorama 2 soundbar and PV1D subwoofer, Sony BDP-S7200 Blu-ray player and Humax FoxSat HDR. Somehow I've managed to get the settings just right as the TV gives a superb picture and sound.

As my wife isn't into cinema very much I have to wait until she's out to watch and listen to my Blu-rays at cinematic sound levels. As she goes to bed earlier than I do, I decided to buy Sony's HW700DS wireless headphones so that I could watch and listen in reasonable cinema quality without disturbing her.

However, I just cannot get them to work at all, probably because of the way I have connected up my system. I am not very technical and got the system working more by luck. I am loath to start moving cables about in case I ruin the present excellent picture and sound.



Sony's MDR-HW700DS surround headphones come with an external processor/HDMI switcher... and a ghost

How can I connect the Sony headphones' box so I can keep my excellent picture and sound and watch my films at night? Hopefully you will be able to help as encouraging my wife to keep going out is making her suspicious!
Quentin Allen

Mark Craven replies: You sent us a schematic drawing showing how you've got your system connected currently, using the B&W soundbar as a hub, with your sources going into it over HDMI and your Sony TV connected to its HDMI output. This all looks fine.

Sony's MDR-HW700DS headphones are cleverer than most, and designed to deliver an authentic surround sound experience from a Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD MA signal, with added processing to create a 9.1 soundstage. The cans are supplied with an HDMI switching box/processor unit, which is what you're having trouble with. This isn't that surprising as the processor offers a variety of functions/options that make it rather complex – I've confused myself just reading the manual...

Check you've got everything setup in the right place/order, and keeping your soundbar in play for when you want to listen without headphones. The 'Connection Example 3' in Sony's manual is what you should follow. Here, your sources are connected first into the Sony's processor, then via its HDMI output to your B&W 'bar. Then run another HDMI connection from the bar's HDMI (ARC) output to the TV's HDMI (ARC) input.

Now, Sony suggests you also need to set the Control for HDMI switch to MODE 2, but also says this will disable the processor's ARC function so an optical cable should be run directly from the TV's output to the Sony processor for when you want to listen to TV audio. As I said, it's confusing.

Anyway, if this is how you have the setup running, then I can't be certain what the problem is. You might want to check that your player is outputting a bitstream audio output and not LPCM. You might also consider connecting your sources to the Sony unit, and then going straight to your TV (bypassing the B&W soundbar), so you can see if it's working correctly in that configuration. If you still can't get any joy, contact Sony's customer services. Good luck! ■

Contact us...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at **letters@homecinemachoice.com**
Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

HOME CINEMA Choice

ISSUE #291 ON SALE Oct 4

➜ IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Home cinema horrors We line up a chilling Blu-ray marathon in time for Halloween
20 years of digital Remembering when the TV world changed forever
IFA 2018 What was hot at the tech expo?

➜ REVIEWS

Elipson Facet Dolby Atmos system Panasonic DP-UB420 4K Blu-ray player **Samsung Q8 4K TV** Optoma HZ40UST laser short-throw PJ
PLUS News, software, opinion, comps and more

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER

4K ULTRA HD 8.3M PIXEL

BENQ W1700
EISA BEST BUY PROJECTOR 2018 - 2019



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY PROJECTOR
BenQ W1700



BenQ TK800



BenQ W1700

True 4K HDR for Grand Cinema & Sports Experience

True 4K UHD 8.3M Pixel Resolution
Hyper-Realistic Video Quality with Projector-Optimised HDR
Auto Vertical Keystone Correction

BenQ.co.uk

© 2018 BenQ Corp. Specification may vary by region, please visit your local stores for details. Actual product's features and specifications are subject to change without notice. This material may include corporate names and trademarks of third parties which are the properties of the third parties respectively.

BenQ

SAPPHIRE

"Ultimate Range"
of Tab Tensioned In-ceiling Screens

SSP from
Only £1,416.00

For when only the best will do ...

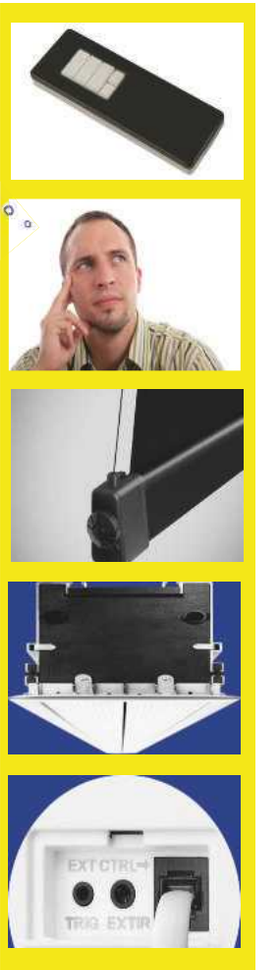


5 Year Warranty

Imagine if

* You had a screen that was almost invisible to visitors until in use. When you finish viewing the trap door closes magically to hide the fabric.
* If the motor and the structure was designed to be whisper quiet.
* If the screen was able to drop down automatically when you turn on your projector.
* If the fabric was one of the best in the business for 4K projection giving vibrant colour with a perfectly flat soft tensioned surface.
* If the product had a 5 year comprehensive warranty.

Dreams are now reality!



Model Numbers	VIEWING SIZE (MM) (L+H)	SIZE (FEET)	CASING (MM) (L+H+D)	ASPECT
SETC200WSF-ATR	2030 x 1140	80" x 45"	2625 x 155 x 170	16:9
SETC240WSF-ATR	2340 x 1320	92" x 52"	2935 x 155 x 170	16:9
SETC270WSF-ATR	2670 x 1500	105" x 59"	3245 x 155 x 170	16:9

Available for next day delivery from many quality retailers and distributors in UK and Ireland

www.sapphireav.com

QR Code

steljes audio



SOLAR YELLOW | FROST WHITE | LAGOON BLUE | GUN METAL GREY | VERMILION RED | ARTISAN BLUE | COAL BLACK

Exceptional Detailing



Exquisite design



New Bamboo Range





3 Year Warranty

Crystal Clear Sound with Bluetooth on all products

QR Code

www.steljesaudio.co.uk

Premier Group (UK) Ltd - Home of Sapphire, ConxEasy and Steljes Audio

WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

Head over to www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions to be in with a chance to win

ITV Classic Movies Steelbooks

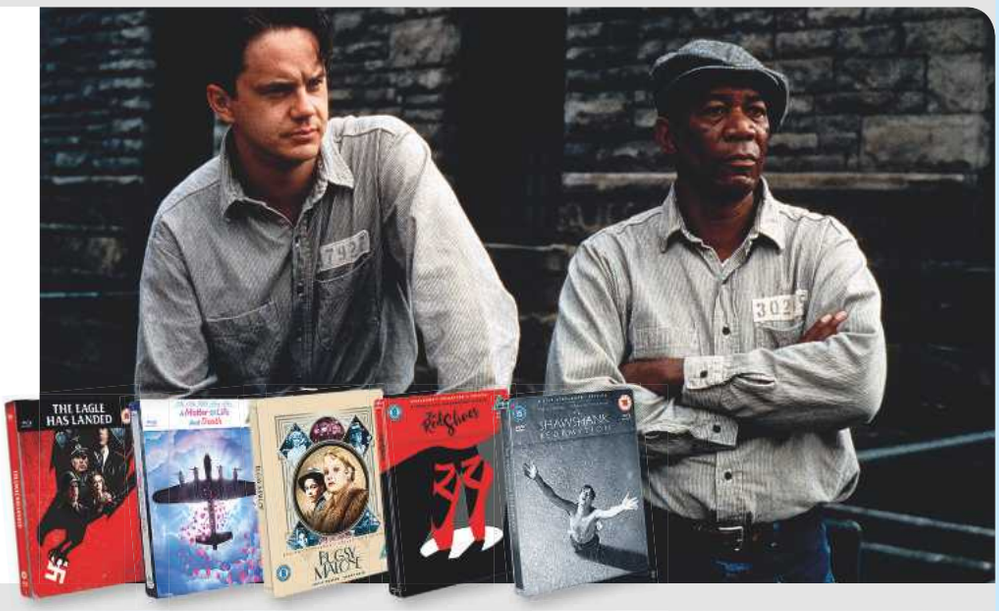
ITV Studios Global Entertainment will be releasing new limited collector's edition Steelbook Blu-rays of *The Red Shoes* (which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year), *A Matter of Life and Death*, *The Eagle Has Landed*, *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Bugsy Malone* on September 10. To mark the occasion we have one set of the five Steelbooks to give away!

Question:

The Shawshank Redemption is based on a novella by which bestselling US author?

Answer:

A) James Patterson
B) Stephen King
C) John Grisham





Police Story 1 & 2

Get ready for a double-dose of action superstar Jackie Chan as Eureka Entertainment brings new restorations of two of his best-loved films to UK Blu-ray for the first time. The limited edition *Jackie Chan's Police Story 1 & 2* Blu-ray double-pack is out now – and we have five copies to be won!

Question:

Jackie Chan and which actor starred in the *Rush Hour* movie series?

Answer:

A) Chris Tucker
B) Chris Pratt
C) Chris Evans



Narcos: Season Three

The third season of the hit Netflix crime drama *Narcos* is now available to own on DVD and Blu-ray, courtesy of Arrow TV. This latest season is available on both formats by itself and as part of a *Narcos: Season 1-3* boxset, and to celebrate the release we have three *Narcos: Season Three* Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

Narcos star Pedro Pascal played a character called Jack Daniels in which action sequel?

Answer:

A) *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*
B) *John Wick: Chapter 2*
C) *Fast & Furious 8*



Death Line

Nasty things are happening on the London Underground in this cult favourite 1972 horror starring Donald Pleasance, which recently made its UK Blu-ray debut courtesy of Network. Newly restored for this release, *Death Line* is ready to scare up a new generation of fans – and to help it along we have five Blu-rays to give away!

Question:

Donald Pleasance played Dr. Sam Loomis in which iconic horror franchise?

Answer:

A) *Halloween*
B) *A Nightmare on Elm Street*
C) *Friday the 13th*

To enter any of the above competitions go to www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions

Terms & Conditions

1. Entrants must be aged 18 or over and resident in the United Kingdom. 2. Employees of MyTimeMedia Ltd and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter. 3. No responsibility will be accepted for delayed, mislaid, lost or damaged entries. 4. Only one entry per household; multiple entries will be discounted. 5. Prizes will be awarded to the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing date. 6. No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winner as prizes. 7. The editor's decision is final. 8. Comp winners' names available on request. 9. The closing date is October 11, 2018. 10. Please note that your data will be managed in compliance with GDPR law. Our privacy law can be found at www. mytimemedia.co.uk/privacy

Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Colin** has used his DIY skills – and eye for a bargain – to create a movie/gaming snug on a tight budget. Now he's thinking of making some hardware upgrades



Colin built the screen, cabinets and lighting unit himself



Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame – introduce yourself!

Hi, I'm Colin True, aged 63 and I'm a contracts manager for a well-known kitchens company.

How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

I have always been interested in home cinemas, but only had room when I moved into the house I'm currently in. This is the first setup I've ever attempted, with only bits and pieces being moved about over the past couple of years.

Why did you decide to create a dedicated cinema room?

When we moved into the house, we gave our son a choice of a large bedroom downstairs or a smaller room upstairs and turning the downstairs room into a cinema/games room. He chose to have a cinema/games room, so we set about working out how to get it all done with a limited budget.

The room – a garage conversion done by the previous owner – measures about 15ft deep by 7ft wide. We put a two-seat sofa in and made the far wall the screen, using a special screen paint which gives it good definition. We also installed a pool table and dart board but these got removed shortly after.

Did you get any help with the build?

I did nearly all the work myself using my carpentry skills and educated guess work for the projector wiring and rear speaker runs. I started working on it only in the evenings after work and whenever I was free at the





weekends. We got a family friend who's a qualified electrician to complete the final connections, such as the inverted plug socket in the ceiling and dimmer switch.

The light tray gave me a problem as I couldn't find one that suited the budget; the one installed was built by myself from scratch. This incorporates the uplighters and six downlighters. The downlighters were too bright, even when dimmed, so I purchased polycarbonate squares and made my own diffusers. These worked but not well enough, so the final effect was achieved by rolling a thin layer of the same paint that forms the accent line on the tray upstand.

The screen frame was built by myself out of timber with a final coat of black. This supports the backlights for the screen.

I made the lower section, which houses the DVD player, Xbox and discs, utilising a kitchen worktop. This has a false back where the electrics are kept out of sight. The sliding doors are made from 6mm MDF with knobs rescued from an old wardrobe.

The walls have been covered in stitched leather-effect wall paper, which I think looks good. Friends actually think that it's real leather!

What kit is in your system?

We have a Philips HDT3510/12 5.1 surround sound system (incorporating a DVD player). We also have my son's Xbox One, with a steering wheel for driving games. This is integrated within the Philips system. For the visuals we use an Optoma H100 720p projector, hung inverted from the ceiling.

What was the last thing that you added to your setup?

The Xbox One was an upgrade from my son's Xbox 360.

What's your favourite bit of hardware?

The Optoma projector. The colours and sharpness of the picture are really good, although only 720p. I also think the lighting has worked out well considering the small amount paid for it all.



The ceiling-mounted Optoma PJ is a 720p model

What do friends and family think of the cinema room?

The whole family think it's great and adds value to the house. My grandchildren love to watch their cartoons and films.

What discs do you use to show off the system?

It really matters on who we are showing it to and what aspect of it we want to display. We use either *Lone Survivor* during the first fight scene or the dog scene in *Avatar* to demo the surround sound capabilities, or we use *Game of Thrones* to show off the picture quality.

Does the setup get a lot of use?

The cinema gets a lot of use by the grandchildren, myself and my son whenever he travels home.

And what are your top 5 favourite films?

Game of Thrones, *Avatar*, *Baby Driver*, *Last Samurai* and *Top Gun*.



Do you have your eye on more upgrades?

I would like to upgrade the sofa to reclining cinema chairs with the built-in cupholders, so we can sit back when watching a film. I have also been looking at upgrading the projector to 1080p, and upgrading the DVD player to Blu-ray.

Any plans for 4K?

Probably not as this has all been built with costs in mind! As said previously I might upgrade to a Full HD system in the future. I've totalled it all up so far with a final figure for everything being around the £1,200 mark (my wife is very good at sourcing bargains) so it's a 'cinema on a budget' ■

Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in *HCC*, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.
5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!



The Ultimate High-End Hi-Fi Experience

10-11 November • De Vere Beaumont Estate
Old Windsor, West Berkshire SL4 2JJ

ADVANCE TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

THE hi-fi SHOW *Live*

Visit: www.hifinews.co.uk/show

PLAYBACK

→**SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR** Marvel's superheroes assemble for their biggest 4K fight yet! **ISLE OF DOGS** A stop-motion animated film with bite **RAMPAGE** The Rock is game for a monster mash **POLICE STORY 1 & 2** New 4K restorations for Jackie Chan's action-comedy classics **RICK AND MORTY** Cult cartoon hits BD **& MORE!**



Power up

Ready Player One → Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD

You don't need a VR headset to watch Steven Spielberg's spectacular love letter to videogames and '80s pop culture. But is there more to *Ready Player One* than simple nostalgia? Find out as we take the 4K disc for a spin on p92.

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



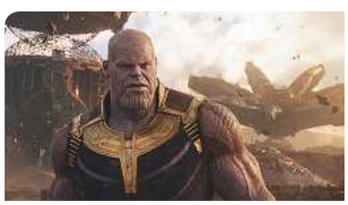
'Quick everyone, hop on my invisible four-seat tandem'



4K ULTRA HD

A crossover like no other

A decade of Marvel movies has led to this epic superhero teamup. Was it worth the wait?





HCC VERDICT

Avengers: Infinity War – Cinematic Universe Edition

➜ Walt Disney ➜ Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD ➜ £29 (US Import)

WE SAY: A relentlessly entertaining Marvel movie gets occasionally spectacular 4K Blu-ray treatment.

Movie: ★★★★½
Picture: ★★★★½
Audio: ★★★★½
Extras: ★★★½☆
OVERALL: ★★★★½

➜ Avengers: Infinity War – Cinematic Universe Edition

Considering how many characters and narrative threads this third *Avengers* film carries, it works pretty well. It's solid entertainment from start to finish, and finds time for some genuinely funny banter. But it's also all a bit exhausting, and the sheer burden of what directorial duo Anthony and Joe Russo are handling means that *Infinity War* lacks the panache of their two earlier *Captain America* movies.

Picture: *Avengers: Infinity War*'s 4K Blu-ray picture quality story starts with some bad news: there's no Dolby Vision version, despite Disney using that HDR technology on its *Black Panther* 4K disc.

The HDR10 image we're left with is a mixed bag, swinging between moments of blistering beauty and moments where improvements over the Full HD encode feel disappointingly minimal.

The image is generally at its best with bright, detailed exterior shots that don't contain too many special effects. Some of the non-Thanos shots in the woods of Wakanda, for instance, deliver a reference-level combination of what feels like real 4K detail (although we don't know whether the film received a 4K or 2K Digital Intermediate), ultra-rich colours, and impressively high typical and peak brightness.

Dark scenes, though, seem a little flat, and don't extend the light range much beyond the 1080p Blu-ray. Picture sharpness is inconsistent, too. This may relate to the amount of digital SFX; the CG landscapes of Titan look softer than the more 'real' vistas of Wakanda, for instance. Colours are clearly ramped up from those offered by the 1080p disc, delivering particularly strong results with the space sequences featuring the Guardians of the Galaxy. The uniforms and clothes of Wakanda look blisteringly intense, rich and lifelike.

Audio: Recent Disney 4K Blu-ray soundtracks have been underwhelming, sounding weirdly compressed and thin. Happily, while certainly not perfect, the Dolby Atmos track exclusive to *Avengers: Infinity War*'s 4K platter marks a clear improvement.

There's healthy bass to add real impact and scale to the film's action scenes, while the upper registers sound reasonably clean and busy without becoming harsh. The rears are employed more aggressively, and enjoy a fuller dynamic range, than on other recent Disney mixes.

Height channels are under-used, and there's still a slightly limited feel to the mix's dynamic range. Overall, though, the *...Infinity War* soundmix at least serves the film well.

Extras: Bonuses comprise a slightly dull chat-track featuring the film's writers and directors; four solid but uninspiring featurettes; four excellent deleted scenes that add to the Marvel universe; and a short-but-sweet gag reel. ***JA***



Deep Blue Sea 2

Warner Bros. → R2 DVD
£12



The laziest sort of DTV sequel, *Deep Blue Sea 2* retreads the same path as the original, albeit with no-name actors and a greatly reduced budget. The twist this time out is that the flooded research station is infested by a school of piranha-like baby sharks, which ends up being even sillier than it sounds. Skipping Blu-ray in the UK, anybody still looking to take the plunge will have to grab this supermarket shelf-filler on DVD. The good news is that the disc's colourful and reasonably sharp anamorphic transfer, plus a better-than-expected set of extras, make this less of an issue than it may have been. ***AvB***

★★☆☆☆

Terminal

Arrow Films → Region B BD
£20



Alice in Wonderland meets *John Wick* in this gloriously gaudy slice of neo-noir. This twisty thriller stars Margot Robbie as a femme fatale on a mission to kill a group of rival hit men. While the script occasionally gives in to a few too many Tarantino-isms, *Terminal* ultimately thrives on Robbie's electrifying performance and its flash visuals. A case of style over substance? Sure. But who cares when something looks this good. Arrow's Blu-ray relishes the lush visuals thanks to a richly saturated 1080p encode. A DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix provides powerful support. ***MC***

★★★½☆

Unsane

Twentieth Century Fox → R2 DVD
£20



Steven Soderbergh's gripping psychological horror follows a young woman (Claire Foy) who finds herself trapped in a psychiatric facility with a man she claims was stalking her. Despite being shot entirely on an iPhone 7 Plus, *Unsane* was finished at 4K – not that this stopped the UK arm of Fox from relegating the film to DVD on these shores (the studio released it on BD and UHD in the US back in June). While watchable, the 1.56:1 SD disc's transfer is hampered by some stuttering (see the leafy lane in Chapter 16) and a lack of definition in the blue-tinted climactic chase (Chapters 18 and 19). ***AvB***

★★★☆☆



Wes Anderson's latest is no dog

Stop-motion animation matches filmmaker's quirks with a surprising amount of heart

→ Isle of Dogs

In a near-future Japan, outbreaks of canine flu and snout fever lead to the cat-loving mayor of Megasaki City banishing all dogs to nearby Trash Island, where they are left to fend for themselves among the city's accumulating garbage. Desperate to be reunited with his beloved companion Spots, the mayor's 12-year-old ward Atari steals a plane and flies to Trash Island, only to crash land. Rescued by a pack of mutts, the unlikely group of companions head of in search of Spots and, along the way, discover the truth about the mayor's dog ban.

Given the slightly unreal, meticulously designed and formally arranged dollhouse feel that Wes Anderson brings to his live-action projects, it's hard to shake the belief that he's arguably more suited to the world of animation. You only have to look at 2009's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* to see how well-suited Anderson's whole aesthetic is to the medium.

Isle of Dogs, his latest film and second foray into the world of stop-motion animation, does nothing to change your mind. In fact, it might just be his most fully satisfying and enjoyable film yet.

Given the stellar voice cast the filmmaker has assembled (including Bryan Cranston, Scarlett Johansson, Greta Gerwig and Anderson regulars Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Jeff Goldblum and Bob Balaban), it should come as no surprise that *Isle of Dogs* is extremely funny. More of a surprise is the sheer love of Japanese culture that oozes from every frame; that and how much the movie makes you care about its cast of stop-motion canines, ensuring it lands every one of its emotional beats.



Picture: Fox's *Isle of Dogs* Blu-ray sports a pin-sharp AVC 2.39:1-framed 1080p encode that picks out the textures in the film's stop-motion marionettes and the hand-built sets they populate. It's also a pleasingly colourful affair, with plenty of bright primaries, while perfect contrast leads to rock-solid black levels that help give the imagery a sense of depth.

Audio: The disc's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is an absolute delight. While big showstopping dynamics are in short supply, the track makes extremely effective use of the full soundstage with precisely rendered sonic details. All of this is backed up by a meaty low-end that gives your subwoofer more of a workout than you may expect.

Extras: Just six short promo featurettes, a gallery of 15 cast photos, the trailer and five art cards. Guess we'll have to wait for the inevitable Criterion Collection reissue to get a full slate of goodies. ***AvB*** >





The film took two years to make and utilised some 1,000 handmade puppets (500 dogs and 500 people)

HCC VERDICT

Isle of Dogs
→ Twentieth Century Fox
→ Region B BD → £25

WE SAY: Despite the paucity of extras, this superb animation is still well worth picking up on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★
Picture: ★★★★★
Audio: ★★★★½
Extras: ★½☆☆☆
OVERALL: ★★★★☆

4K ULTRA HD

Pop culture thrill ride

DISC OF THE MONTH

Legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg boots up a virtual world of action and nostalgia with his latest sci-fi spectacular...



Ready Player One

There can't be many novels harder to turn into a film than Ernest Cline's tale of a virtual reality-obsessed future underpinned by 1980s pop culture. But after a run of three rather self-indulgent flicks, director Steven Spielberg rises to the challenge superbly, crafting the film's separate virtual and real worlds with imagination and charm, and weaving them together beautifully to create something memorable.

Easter Eggs

***Ready Player One* is packed with pop culture references. Here are four of our faves...**



Pork-Chop Express (014.03): The jackknifing truck that almost knocks Art3mis off her motorbike? It's Jack Burton's cab from *Big Trouble in Little China*!



Jack Slater III (014.42): The race also passes a cinema with a marquee advertising Schwarzenegger in *Jack Slater III*. The *Jack Slater* films were, of course, the fictional franchise at the heart of *Last Action Hero*.



The Overlook Hotel (064.23): Okay, given that it's the setting for the second challenge, references to Stanley Kubrick/Stephen King's *The Shining* are impossible to miss.



Charm of Making (081.21): The magic phrase used to activate the Orb of Osuvox is the 'Charm of Making' recited by Merlin and Morgana in John Boorman's 1981 fantasy epic *Excalibur*.


Anyone fancy a game of *OutRun* instead?

Picture: Perhaps because of its extensive use of CG, which the film industry still tends to only render in 2K, *Ready Player One* received a 2K Digital Intermediate for its cinematic run, so the Ultra HD Blu-ray is an upscale of this. While retaining the effects and live-action video at the same resolution delivers a mostly consistent finish throughout, the upscaled image doesn't look as crisp and detailed as the best 4K releases. A number of other upscaled 4K discs look crisper, in fact.

That said, Warner's Ultra HD Blu-ray still looks sharper and more detailed than the 1080p presentation that it ships with – enough to make the VR world of Oasis look like a vision of the future rather than mere current-gen videogame.

The 4K encodes's main treats, though, come from its use of HDR and wide colour. The dynamic range is far wider on the 4K disc, with some of the deepest black levels we've seen against brightness peaks far more intense than anything the Full HD platter's SDR image can provide.

The full extent of *Ready Player One*'s HDR grade is particularly spectacular in the film's VR realm, during set-piece sequences such as Aetch's workshop, the night club, and the start of the car race.

When it comes to colour, the 4K Blu-ray is more proficient than the 1080p Blu-ray at capturing that slightly pushed and expanded look associated with gaming graphics during the Oasis sequences. In doing so, it also serves the film thematically; there's more visual distance between the enticing world of Oasis and the drab browns and greys of the real world.

Some shots in the latter environment appear a little bleached in their brightest areas; more so than can be explained by either the film's style or potential shortcomings with our display. A handful of 'real-world' shots look curiously soft, too.

The Dolby Vision version of the film provided alongside the standard HDR10 one is a touch disappointing, not because it doesn't make the picture look better (it does) but its improvements to dynamic range and colour aren't as pronounced as we've become accustomed to.

Despite the niggles, there's no doubt the 4K BD of *Ready Player One* does enough visually to justify buying over the Full HD version.



Audio: The *Ready Player One* 4K and Full HD discs both benefit from a Dolby Atmos track (as is often the case with Warner Bros. releases, however, this isn't the default track and must be manually selected from the disc menus).

The mix is good rather than great. Its best attribute is how busily it uses all the channels. Effects during action scenes are steered aggressively around a convincing three-dimensional soundscape, with bold transitions delivered in all directions. These are supported by good overhead use, which proves effective in adding scale to the film's often large environments.

Dialogue is clean but well contextualised, and while subtle ambient and treble effects aren't used as liberally as they are in the densest mixes, they at least sound pristine when they do crop up.

Bass levels stretch deep enough to underpin set-piece scenes with the whoomps and rumbles needed to make them sound meaty. We're not, though, talking about an LFE track that works as hard as it does with stand-out Atmos mixes such as *Blade Runner 2049* or *Dredd*.

Extras: *Ready Player One*'s extras don't include a commentary, and all are found on the Full HD disc. There is, however, a pretty substantial – if rather pedestrian – hour-long *Making of...* documentary. It's biggest fault is that it spends too much time showing nice people saying nice things about other nice people.

There are also dedicated featurettes covering the cast and crew's fondness for 1980s pop culture (Spielberg also discusses how he nixed a bunch of references to his own films that appeared in the original novel); the film's impressive VFX; sound design (with contributions from audio genius Gary Rydstrom) and Alan Silvestri's score; plus a quirky interview with novelist Cline and actor Tye Sheridan inside the author's memorabilia-packed home. ***JA***





Spielberg made ***The Post*** while waiting for this film's digital FX to be completed



HCC VERDICT

Ready Player One

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

WE SAY: Spielberg's most visually spectacular film for a long while definitely delivers in 4K.

Movie: ★★★★½

Picture: ★★★★½

Audio: ★★★★½

Extras: ★★★½☆

OVERALL: ★★★★½

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



F1 2018

Codemasters ➜ PS4, Xbox One, Windows PC ➜ £50



Since racing game specialist Codemasters took on the F1 licence it has regularly put out solid driving simulations based on each season. The only problem is that, like with other annual sports game refreshes, yearly improvements are often minor, so it can be hard to recommend the investment in one year's model if you already own the previous instalment.

Not so this year. *F1 2018* is easy to recommend, not just because it introduces some of the more significant rule changes in the sport for several seasons, but because it is a more rounded game. That's mainly thanks to the best career mode in an F1 title for many a year. Long gone are the restrictions that forced you to play as a real-life pro driver only. You can create your own avatar and have them signed to any racing team you fancy. What's more, when you are at Mercedes, Ferrari or any of the others, you have a say in how the car technology is developed and runs in future. It is part driving sim, part management game.





There are plenty of tweaks in the actual on-track racing too, with handling feeling much better. It is also more forgiving to learners, who aren't just relegated to playing in dumb, easy mode, but can actually adjust many of the in-game elements to provide enough of a challenge.

Another big win is the use of HDR. The increased resolutions afforded by PS4 Pro, Xbox One X and a high-end gaming PC add realism to the action, but not as much as HDR, which gives every track in the 2018 season a more tangible feel. Whether the sun is blaring or heavens open, it is a sight to behold.

The audio is superb too. With surround sound enabled you get an excellent idea of spatial awareness, with the roaring engines of cars around yours giving you ideal indicators of where they are. It also works wonderfully with virtual surround headphones.

F1 2018 isn't the most groundbreaking of updates ever, but it's one of the best entries in the series and an ideal jumping on point for newbies and veterans alike.

★★★★☆

Tomb Raider [4K]

Warner Bros. ➜ Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD ➜ £35



While it didn't exactly set the world alight at the box office, the recent *Tomb Raider* reboot is worth a spin on Ultra HD Blu-ray – if only to savour the absolutely spectacular Dolby Vision-graded 2160p encode. The story's island setting provides plenty of opportunities for the expanded colour gamut to shine, while increased dynamic range pulls out additional highlights in darker scenes. Meanwhile, the uptick in detailing gives the image a photorealistic look at times. The expansive Atmos mix from the 1080p disc (reviewed in HCC #288) is repeated here. ***MC***

★★★★☆

Darkest Hour [4K]

Universal Pictures ➜ Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD ➜ £35



Gary Oldman's superb lead performance is the main reason to check out this otherwise superficial, award-baiting biographical drama about Churchill's first few weeks as Prime Minister, leading to his famous 'We shall fight on the beaches...' speech. While the film's shadowy photography results in a pretty flat 1080p encode, the 4K incarnation fares better with the HDR10 presentation highlighting the carefully placed beams of light and giving the visuals a greater sense of depth. The Atmos soundtrack is understandably restrained, while a chat-track is the pick of the thin selection of extras. ***MC***

★★★☆☆

The X-Files: Season 11

Twentieth Century Fox ➜ All-region BD £39



Oh dear. As if the dismal 2016 'Event Series' hadn't made it clear enough, this latest batch of *X-Files* episodes confirms the show's best days are long behind it. That said, while much of it falls painfully flat (especially the driving story arc for the season), this 10-episode run does serve up two gems: the hilariously meta *The Lost Art of Forehead Sweat* and ingenious A.I. tale *Rm9sbG93ZXJz*. Also worthy of praise are this three-disc set's crisp 1.78:1 Full HD visuals, immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics and informative extras. ***AvB***

★★½☆☆



Where's David Attenborough when you really need him?



Doing the monster-mash

The Rock takes on three colossal critters in this videogame adaptation. What could go wrong?

➜ Rampage

If you're anything like us and love a) The Rock and b) a good monster movie, then '80s arcade game adaptation *Rampage* probably sounds right up your street. Sadly, though, unless you're generously willing to consider it 'so bad it's good', The Rock taking on a trio of 'giganticised' animals turns out to be far less fun than it sounds. Not only is the script woeful, but the all-important special effects are hit-and-miss. When the highlight of a film is a gorilla making crude hand gestures, you know you're onto a loser...

Picture: *Rampage*'s 4K HDR10 picture quality is oddly uninspiring. When compared to the 1080p incarnation it appears aggressively bright. That isn't necessarily a bad thing in its own right, but here the brightness appears to have been dialled in without an equivalent ramping up of the colours, meaning tones sometimes look washed-out and unnatural.

The disc's optional Dolby Vision presentation pushes the colour content a little more, and better controls some of these washed-out areas. But it's still hardly a classic example of the Ultra HD format's visual charms.

The 4K upscale of the film's original 2K Digital Intermediate also exposes the film's digital effects, especially during the largescale action towards the climax. However, the added resolution does provide an increase in clarity and textures for live-action footage over the 1080p version.

As noted with *Avengers: Infinity War* (see p90), this rather inconsistent sharpness is something that we're coming to expect from effects-heavy titles that combine high-resolution cinematography (most of *Rampage*'s non-CG elements were captured in 3.4K and 6.5K) with 2K effects, shove everything into a 2K Digital Intermediate, and later upscale this to 4K.

Audio: *Rampage* is on safer AV ground with its Dolby Atmos mix (which also appears on the 1080p Blu-ray). This embraces the audio potential of giant beasts tearing down city blocks with huge dynamics – especially at low frequencies – plus plenty of aggressive steering of effects to all corners of a well-defined three-dimensional space.

Height channels are used for tying audio transitions together, and there are some imaginative and lively smaller effects. The overhead layer could have been used a bit more for general ambience, though, and gunfire can sound a touch muted. But overall *Rampage*'s soundtrack is the star of this 4K BD show.

Extras: The film's extras (all found on the Full HD Blu-ray) are lightweight but fun. They comprise a series of featurettes covering the arcade game the film is inspired by; the stunts; the visual effects; shooting in Chicago; and an excellent look at the techniques used to create a convincing super-sized gorilla.

Otherwise there's just a short gag reel and a series of (pretty dull) deleted scenes. ***JA***





Rampage **is The Rock's third film with director Peyton Reed**



HCC VERDICT

Rampage

➜ Warner Bros. ➜ Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD ➜ £35

WE SAY: Uninspiring visuals make this depressingly dumb flick even less tempting on 4K Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★½☆☆

Picture: ★★★½☆

Audio: ★★★★½

Extras: ★★★☆☆

OVERALL: ★★★☆☆



It's time to flip the pickle

Fed up of waiting for a UK Blu-ray? Then try looking Down Under instead...

→ Rick and Morty: Season 3

'Oh, it gets darker Morty. Welcome to the darkest year of our adventures.' Whatever else he might be, alcoholic, amoral and sociopathic genius Rick Sanchez is true to his word. And this third season of Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon's cult cartoon about the misadventures of the mad scientist and his teenage grandson Morty is very dark indeed.

Yes, *Rick and Morty* has never been one to shy away from exploring the very worst aspects of the human psyche and frequently appears to celebrate Rick's abhorrent behaviour. But even so, this latest run really doubles down on the misery, throwing the entire family through the emotional wringer.

Thankfully, from the superhero-skewering *Saw*-alike antics of *Vindicators 3: The Return of Worldender,* to the startling revelations of *The ABCs of Beth*, the show remains as funny as ever. What else would you expect from a season that also sees Rick turn himself into a pickle ('I'm pickle Riiiik!'), fashion an exo-skeleton out of the corpses of rats, and go toe-to-toe with a trained killer – all to avoid having to attend counselling with his family...

Of course, the most frustrating thing about being a *Rick and Morty* fan in the UK is that the first season of the show only made it to Blu-ray over here earlier this year. And with no word on when the subsequent seasons will follow (and given that Warner Bros.' US discs are locked to Region A), the best option for those wanting to catch up with the 'toon on Blu-ray is to import the Region B platters put out by Madman Entertainment in Australia. But how does this latest release measure up?



Picture: The fact that *Rick and Morty: Season 3* squeezes its 10 episodes onto a single disc doesn't appear to have had an adverse effect on its AVC 1.78:1 Full HD encodes. Crisply delineated, brightly coloured and free from digital anomalies, the show looks pretty damn great on Blu-ray.

Audio: While use of the surrounds is fairly limited, the show's Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mixes offer a pleasingly wide front-end and good dynamic range. Dialogue sounds natural and is prioritised at all times.

Extras: Every episode features a commentary from the show's creators, with the first (*The Rickshank Redemption*) and third (*Pickle Rick*) also boasting star-studded bonus chat-tracks. Every episode is also available in animatic form and has its own short EPK featurette. There's also a funny look at voice recording (with actors Chris Parnell and Spencer Grammer), and a short but fascinating two-part piece looking back at the show's origins. ***AvB***





Mad science and grizzly violence are par for the course in this Adult Swim cartoon

HCC VERDICT

Rick and Morty: Season 3
→ Madman Entertainment
→ Region B BD → £25 (AU Import)

WE SAY: Can't wait for a UK Blu-ray release? Then this impressive Aussie disc is your saviour.

Movie: ★★★★★
Picture: ★★★★½
Audio: ★★★½★
Extras: ★★★½★
OVERALL: ★★★★★

Poldark: Complete Series Four

ITV Studios → Region B BD
£28



With rumours hinting that the next series will be the show's last, this run of eight episodes succeeds in shaking up the BBC's popular period melodrama with a shift in focus to London's political arena, as well as the death of a major character, giving *Poldark* a renewed sense of purpose and vitality. It also looks very good on BD, with the 1080i50 encodes making the most of the attractive locations. Detailed DTS-HD MA 5.1 tracks provide ample sonic support, even if they aren't especially expansive. Four brief *Making of...* featurettes are also included. ***MC***

★★★★★

How to Talk to Girls at Parties

Studiocanal → Region B BD
£23



Expanded from the Neil Gaiman short story of the same name, John Cameron Mitchell's gonzo teen sci-fi love story (punk boy meets alien girl in 1970s Croydon) may make a few missteps, but its endearing weirdness and oddly optimistic spirit make for a uniquely enjoyably piece of cinema. This 1080p encode faithfully reproduces the film's grainy aesthetic, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix impresses with its potency and playful use of the surrounds. A solitary deleted scene and 13 far-too-brief EPK interviews are the only extras. ***AvB***

★★★★★

Black Book

101 Films Black Label → All-region BD & R2 DVD → £15



Paul Verhoeven's superb World War II thriller makes a very welcome return to BD in the UK. Improving on the old Palisades Tartan release, this new platter boasts improved contrast and a commensurate uptick in fine object detail in its AVC-encoded 2.40:1 1080p imagery. Meanwhile, the disc's Dutch-language DTS-HD MA 5.1 track is wonderfully tactile and surprisingly powerful. Exclusive new interviews with Verhoeven and director of photography Karl-Walter Lindenlaub join two archival interviews. It's a shame there's still no sign of the chat-track found on Sony's old US release. ***AvB***

★★★★½

Suffering of Ninko

Third Window Films → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £15



Buddhist monk Ninko has a problem: women (and some men) find him utterly irresistible. And things only get worse for Ninko when he encounters a demonic spirit with a fondness for seducing men and draining them of their bodily fluids. Made with a mix of live-action and animation, this intriguing and stylish Japanese folk tale ultimately struggles to sustain even a meagre 70-minute running time and would surely have worked better as a short. The film's washed-out blacks and instances of muddy digital grading don't make for the most attractive Blu-ray encode. ***AvB***

★★½★★

We create beautiful, award winning cinemas

PYRAMID

Our team of expert Designers & Engineers will create your dream theatre from start to finish using the very best acoustics & fabric treatments, furniture & lighting, alongside industry leading cinema brands.



Visit our Devon showroom* to experience the only dedicated Home Cinema & Integration facility in the region, c/w 7.2.4 Dolby Atmos, 4k projection and astonishing sound

TRINNOV | HIGH•END | Artcoustic

*By Appointment Only

kaleidescape EXPERIENCE CENTRE 2018

HOME CINEMA Choice DREAM THEATRE

Offices in London & Devon - Nationwide coverage

www.thepyramidgroup.co.uk

CEDIA AWARDS 2017 WINNER Best Lighting Control and Installation EMEA

CEDIA AWARDS 2017 WINNER Best Home Cinema EMEA Level II

CEDIA AWARDS 2018 FINALIST Best Showroom EMEA

CEDIA™ MEMBER

@thepyramidgroup @thepyramidgroup Pyramid_AV



Bill Duke (centre) also acted opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Commando*



4K ULTRA HD

'Gonna have me some fun...'

DNR tools have been set aside to leave *Predator* and its sequels looking good in Ultra HD

→ Predator: 3-Movie Collection

To coincide with the release of new movie *The Predator*, the series' 1987 franchise original (*Predator*), plus its two existing standalone sequels (*Predator 2* and *Predators*), get the 4K boxset treatment. Watching all three in succession makes for a fun, blood-soaked, night in your movie room – there's little to link the trio together beyond their alien antagonists, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Picture: The presence of Fox's previous Blu-ray release of *Predator* (each film in the boxset is given a 1080p disc) makes it easy to see how much of an improvement this new 4K HDR iteration represents. The 2010 Full HD outing is the same DNR'd mess as it always was, with any sign of film grain replaced by a plasticky, unnatural sheen that makes for uncomfortable viewing. Here, film grain is ever present (no more so than over the opening studio logo), and with it the movie's cinematic origins return.

The image is a clear step up in terms of sharpness and clarity, bringing greater definition and sense of depth to the dense jungle foliage and battle-scarred faces of Dutch's team. It's not a showcase 4K experience, however, running up against the limitations of the original location-based cinematography.

HDR makes for welcome, subtle improvements, particularly in the rich orange fireballs during the compound attack sequence. And colours overall appear much more natural, not just the varied greens on display, but the skin tones and pools of gooey blood.





It's a similar story with *Predator 2*, albeit this sequel never looked quite as ropey on BD as its predecessor. Definition is moderately improved via this 4K outing, and HDR highlights and better colour handling are obvious. But it remains a movie that offers gorgeous imagery one minute, and flat-looking sequences the next.

Predators is the cleanest, crispest experience of the trio. Lensed digitally and framed at 2.40:1, it unearths plenty of detail from its 2K-4K upscale. The palette favours dark tones over vibrant highlights, but sequences such as the meeting with Noland in his hidey-hole exhibit plenty of shadow info and strong contrast.

Audio: Each movie sports the same DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundmix on its 1080p and 4K discs – there are no object audio remixes to tempt double-dippers. *Predators'* track is the most lively, but that's not to say *Predator* or *Predator 2* don't impress with their dynamic range and channel separation. Purists may want to check out *Predator*'s 4.0 soundmix for an authentic 1987 multiplex experience.

Extras: Again there's nothing new here, but the Blu-ray versions of the trio feature generous selections of behind-the-scenes featurettes, SFX breakdowns and more. Commentaries (two in the case of *Predator 2*) are also carried over to the 4K platters, as is *Predator*'s pop-up trivia track. ***MC***

HCC VERDICT

Predator: 3-Movie Collection

→ Twentieth Century Fox → UHD BD & All-region (*Predator* & *Predator 2*) /Region B (*Predators*) BD → £56

WE SAY: Extras and audio remain the same, but fans of this sci-fi action franchise will cherish the 4K update.

Movie: ★★★★☆
Picture: ★★★★☆
Audio: ★★★★☆
Extras: ★★★½☆
OVERALL: ★★★★☆

Amazonia: The Catherine Miles Story

88 Films → All-region BD
£13



Also released under the titles *White Slave* and *Cannibal Holocaust 2*, this exploitative 1985 jungle romance arrived at the tail-end of the Italian cannibal cycle and eschews a lot (but not quite all) of the nastiness that was the genre's calling card. Based on a new 2K transfer from the original camera negative, the disc's 1.85:1 Full HD image generally holds up pretty well, although the various clips of stock footage look pretty rough. The biggest selling point, however, is a superb new doc looking at the final years of this niche horror genre. ***AvB***

★★★☆☆

Hatchet 4: Victor Crowley

Thunderbird Releasing → R2 DVD
£16



Hideously deformed swamp-dwelling spirit of vengeance Victor Crowley returns in this fourth instalment in writer-director Adam Green's gleefully gory supernatural slasher franchise. Working with a reduced budget, Green plays up the laughs and delivers the most enjoyable *Hatchet* film since the original. While it's a shame there's no UK Blu-ray, this DVD still impresses with its cleanly-rendered anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer, moody DD5.1 soundtrack and sizeable array of extras (including two chat-tracks and a 65-min *Making of...*). ***AvB***

★★★½☆

Hansel and Gretel

88 Asia → Region B BD
£13



The second UK Blu-ray outing for this freaky South Korean fable (the first came courtesy of Terracotta Media) does a great job of replicating the film's striking aesthetic, with the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode delivering saturated reds, greens and blues throughout its running time. The accompanying DTS-HD MA 5.1 track is suitably atmospheric and makes good use of the full loudspeaker array. In addition to an excellent new audio commentary (in English) by director Yim Pil-sung and genre buff Calum Waddell, the disc offers up a trio of interviews and a couple of trailers. ***AvB***

★★★★½

The Case of the Scorpion's Tail

Arrow Video → All-region BD
£25



Even if it never quite matches the lurid madness of Sergio Martino's best *giallo* thrillers (*The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* and *All the Colours of the Dark*), this nimble 1971 flick still packs in all of the outrageous twists and turns you could hope for. Newly restored in 2K, *...Scorpion's Tail* looks sensational on Blu-ray, with the 2.35:1 encode exhibiting lush colours, accurate grain structure and a lack of print damage. Cleaned-up LPCM Italian and English mono soundtracks are provided. Extras include a chat-track, two interviews and two video essays. ***AvB***

★★★★☆

Superb Blu-ray for a haunting film

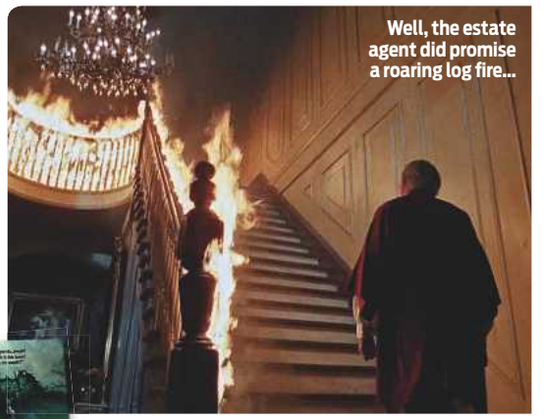
Peter Medak's sombre ghost story finally gets the home entertainment release it deserves

→ The Changeling: Limited Edition

Still haunted by the death of his wife and daughter in a tragic accident, New York composer John Russell (George C. Scott) relocates to Seattle, where he rents an old Gothic pile. However, John soon comes to realise that he isn't alone in his new home and that the mansion is full of terrible secrets that refuse to stay dead and buried.

Released in 1980 to little acclaim or fanfare, *The Changeling* has gone on to be recognised as one of the best cinematic ghost stories. Following in the footsteps of Robert Wise's *The Haunting* (1963) and prefiguring the likes of Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001), Peter Medak's *The Changeling* is the sort of low-key supernatural thriller that is more concerned with creating an uneasy atmosphere than making you scream. That's not to say that the film is incapable of delivering some effective shocks (you'll never look at a wheelchair the same way again), but it's the mood that really matters.

And while it falters a little in its final act as the story moves out of the mansion, *The Changeling* is an unexpectedly mature piece of cinema from the filmmaker who would go on to subject horror fans to the offensively awful *Species II*.



Well, the estate agent did promise a roaring log fire...







Picture: Based on a new 4K scan and restoration of the film's interpositive (apparently the best surviving element), the improvement in image quality over the murky old 2002 R2 DVD release is simply staggering. Despite the film's rather drab aesthetic, colours now appear noticeably warmer. Meanwhile, the improved clarity of the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode results in vastly increased picture detail, although the pervasive grain field does hold it back from looking absolutely pin-sharp.

Audio: Second Sight's Blu-ray offers a choice of the original stereo (LPCM 2.0) soundtrack and a remixed 5.1 (DTS-HD MA) version. Both are robust and technically proficient, with the remix making sparse, but effective use of the added channel separation for bumps, bangs and other spooky sounds.

Extras: Excellent disc-based extras take the form of a chat-track by Medak and producer Joel Michaels; three featurettes about the 'true story' behind the film, scoring the movie and production design; a tour of the shooting locations; an appreciation by genre filmmaker Mick Garris; the trailer; and a TV spot.

Second Sight's Limited Edition package also comes bundled with a 40-page collectible booklet; a double-sided poster; and the CD soundtrack. ***AvB*** >

HCC VERDICT

The Changeling: Limited Edition

→ Second Sight → All-region BD → £30

WE SAY: An extremely handsome Blu-ray debut for this sombre, yet spooky, haunted house story.

Movie: ★★★★☆
Picture: ★★★★☆
Audio: ★★★½☆
Extras: ★★★★☆
OVERALL: ★★★★☆



Jackie wouldn't let anybody else touch his life-size policeman action figure

We'll cop to loving this release

The film that introduced Jackie Chan to Western audiences still takes your breath away on BD





HCC VERDICT

Jackie Chan's Police Story & Police Story 2

➜ Eureka! ➜ Region B BD
➜ £30

WE SAY: Not quite perfect, but still the best Chan's action-comedy classics have looked or sounded.

Movie: ★★★★½
Picture: ★★★★½
Audio: ★★★½½
Extras: ★★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★½

➜ Jackie Chan's Police Story & Police Story 2



After years of success at the Asian box office, Jackie Chan got his big international breakthrough with 1985's *Police Story*.

This spectacular action-comedy finds the martial arts superstar playing Chan Ka-Kui, a Hong Kong cop tasked with protecting a witness (Bridget Lin) who the police hope will testify in a case against a ruthless drug lord (Cho Leung). All of which is merely the framework on which Chan hangs a series of audacious stunts and fight scenes.

The result, even in the age of *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*, is nothing less than breathtaking, with Chan and his stunt team repeatedly risking life and limb. No wonder, then, that the film remains so highly regarded by action fans around the world.

Released three years later, *Police Story 2* doesn't quite hit the same highs as its predecessor. The main problem is that, despite the extended running time, there are actually fewer big set-pieces. Sure, the playground and factory fights are still gob-smackingly brilliant, but there's nothing to really match the outrageousness of the first film's shanty town destruction derby or its climactic shopping mall brawl.



Picture: Both films have undergone new 4K restoration at Italy's L'Immagine Ritrovata and, as you might expect, the upgrade in image quality over the previous DVD and Blu-ray releases is substantial.

Not only do the 2.35:1 1080p encodes look more organic, but detailing and clarity are both vastly improved (although *Police Story 2* does have an inherently softer look). Colours are also much warmer, and while L'Immagine Ritrovata once again indulges in its familiar revisionist colour-timing, it's far less troublesome and in-your-face as has been the case with some of its other restorations.

Audio: Both films offer a variety of Cantonese and English soundtracks in DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM mono incarnations. While the nature of the material reveals plenty of limitations in range and dynamics, they're still energetic affairs. The 5.1 Cantonese mix on the first film suffers from a couple of brief but noticeable drop-outs.

Extras: Both discs are packed with goodies, including alternate cuts of both films; archival interviews; outtakes; and trailers. Our personal favourite, however, is the 1989 episode of Jonathan Ross's *Son of the Incredibly Strange Film Show*, which served as the first introduction to Chan for many UK film enthusiasts. ***AvB***

Tideland

Arrow Video → Region B BD
£25



Reviled by critics on its original release in 2006, Terry Gilliam's twisted childhood fantasy about a young girl's decent into madness following the death of her junkie parents remains a difficult watch thanks to its unflinching handling of the darkness and trauma that lie at the heart of its story. Originally released on Blu-ray here by Universal in 2014, Arrow Video's disc is based on the same (very good) HD master and there's nothing to really call between the two in terms of AV quality. This reissue does, however, up the number of extras, with a chat-track and interviews among the additions. ***AvB***

★★★½☆

Dead Ringers

ITV Studios → Region B BD
£20



A top-notch Blu-ray release of David Cronenberg's 1988 psychosexual drama about identical twin gynaecologists (brilliantly played by Jeremy Irons) is something fans have long hoped for. Sadly, ITV's barebones platter still falls short – not just for it's lack of extras (there's no sign of the chat-track or other goodies from the old Criterion Collection DVD), but also for the decision to frame its otherwise adequate 1080p encode at 1.78:1, while Cronenberg's stated preference is a 1.66:1 frame. The only audio on offer is a clean, if fairly subdued, LPCM 2.0 dual-mono soundtrack. ***AvB***

★★★☆☆

Sex, Lies, and Videotape

Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£28



Whether or not you consider Steven Soderbergh's Palme d'Or-winning directorial debut to still be his best film, there's no denying that Criterion has done this milestone in modern indie cinema proud with its Blu-ray package. Given a new 4K scan from the original 35mm negative and with a new remix of the original audio track (the sixth time sound editor Larry Blake has revisited the material, according to one of the extras), it's safe to say the film has never enjoyed such a robust home video outing. Worthwhile extras include a fascinating chat-track, extensive interviews and detailed restoration notes. ***AvB***

★★★★★



BD beauty has a beastly side

Technical issue takes the shine off what may have been a definitive disc release

→ La Belle et la Bête

The 1991 animated Disney version may be better known today, but French poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau's 1946 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* remains the most enchanting (and influential) cinematic retelling of the classic fairy tale.

However, Cocteau's masterpiece is no mere children's film (something spelt out by an opening preamble that directly addresses an adult audience), with the filmmaker making the Beast's fight against his more animalistic urges a key part of the story – which also fits with the unexpectedly sensual atmosphere that often pervades the film.

The most striking aspect remains its baroque production design; the Beast's castle is a palace of wonders, where doors can talk and the arms that stick out of the walls holding candelabras turn out to be real human limbs.

Against this, there's always the chance that the actors could get lost in the mix. However, Josette Day's stylised performance as Belle (constantly moving from one painterly pose to another) feels completely at home in the world the film creates. Meanwhile, behind the fantastic makeup, Jean Marais's Bête (described by Sir Christopher Frayling as 'an anguished Puss in Boots' in his commentary) unexpectedly provides the story's humanity.

Picture: For the most part, this BFI Blu-ray is a real beauty. The 4K restoration undertaken by SNC/Groupe M6 and Cinémathèque Français in 2013 clearly improves on the master used for the 2011 Region A Criterion Collection release in a number of areas, including black levels, density and detailing.



Unfortunately, all of this good work is hampered slightly by an encoding issue, which has resulted in some unsightly macro-blocking in several scenes. It's not ruinous – and those watching the disc in a well-lit room may not even notice it – but for those watching it on a large display in a darkened den, it is a problem. Here's hoping the BFI addresses the issue with a re-pressing in the not-too-distant future.

Audio: The LPCM 2.0 mono track has also been cleaned up and serves the film well given the slightly flat nature of the source material. Georges Auric's score is the real highlight here.

Extras: As well as the aforementioned commentary, the BFI's Blu-ray offers up a 51-minute French doc about the making of the film; a featurette about Cocteau's working relationship with designer Christian Berard; three deleted scenes (two of which only survive as audio); two trailers; and a 1938 French claymation adaptation of *Bluebeard*. ***AvB***

>





This magical movie serves up a feast of opulent costumes and baroque sets

HCC VERDICT

La Belle et la Bête
→ BFI → Region B BD
→ £20

WE SAY: An otherwise impressive Blu-ray package is hampered by an unfortunate encoding issue.

Movie: ★★★★½
Picture: ★★★½☆
Audio: ★★★½☆
Extras: ★★★½☆
OVERALL: ★★★½☆

ON DEMAND

'How about we just call him Hondo?'

The S.W.A.T. sergeant with the implausible nickname is back in this glossy US TV series

➜ S.W.A.T.: Season One

Shawn Ryan, creator of the excellent US police drama *The Shield*, has had a patchy career since that show ended ten years ago. Dramas *Last Resort* and *Timeless* have both been cancelled/cut short, and a pilot for a *Beverly Hills Cop* TV series wasn't picked up. Yet with his latest venture *S.W.A.T.* (a remake of the 1975 TV series/2003 action flick) already greenlit for a second series, has he recaptured the old magic?

Not exactly. While *The Shield* was overtly, deliberately gritty (it was shot on 16mm film, for instance), *S.W.A.T.* is altogether slicker, shinier and no way near as interesting.

Relative unknown Shemar Moore takes the role of S.W.A.T. teamer Daniel 'Hondo' Harrelson, who – after a shootout goes wrong – surprisingly finds himself given control of his unit ahead of more senior candidates. Harrelson's strength is that he was born and raised in the Los Angeles neighbourhood he serves, and can provide a bridge between the community and the boys in blue. But is his appointment merely a political tool, can he hold his team together, and can he deal with every bad guy the script-writers throw at him over a season of 45-minute episodes?

Dialogue subtlety and unpredictable drama aren't the show's strong points; *S.W.A.T.* always feels a little safe and lightweight even when the bullets are flying. It's competently put together though, and you'll probably find yourself getting drawn in by the relative cosiness of it all.





Picture: *S.W.A.T.* is available in 4K via Sky's on-demand hub and looks generally impressive, with plenty of distinct detail in its 1.78:1 image. Shot on digital cameras, it's mainly crisp and clean, but noise can be a distraction during low-lit shots/bursts of gunsmoke. Daylight sequences fare better, and the blue and red squad car lights have a lush richness to them. Its opening episode, directed by *Fast & Furious* alumnus Justin Lin, has some real cinematic flourishes; later episodes can feel more pedestrian.

Audio: *S.W.A.T.* isn't one of Sky's Atmos broadcasts, but the 5.1 mixes here are worth bothering your AVR/speakers with. Dialogue is well handled, and fire-fights and speeding vehicles are given plenty of space to make an impact. The by-the-numbers score, however, can get grating after a while. ***MC***





The role of Hondo Harrelson was previously played by Samuel L. Jackson in the 2003 *S.W.A.T.* movie

HCC VERDICT

S.W.A.T.: Season One

➜ Sky Boxsets

WE SAY: Not the most imaginative show around, but worth an audition if you fancy some slick cop drama.

Movie: ★★★☆☆
Picture: ★★★★☆
Audio: ★★★★☆
OVERALL: ★★★½☆





James McAvoy was an early choice for the role of Peter, now played by Michael Peña

➜ Extinction

➜ Netflix (Universal Pictures)

What if you had premonitions of an alien invasion, and kept passing out and experiencing scenes of massive devastation? And then what if these dreams start to become a reality? That's the premise of *Extinction*, a Universal production nabbed by Netflix when the studio opted to cash-out.

Futuristic spacecraft deal death from the skies, slaughtering all and sundry without compunction. The opening assault recalls nothing less than the original Cylon attack on the Colonies, in the pilot episode of *Battlestar Galactica* (the original 1978 version). The staging may not be coincidental.

Will Michael Peña's Peter, our tormented lead, and Lizzy Caplan's Alice, his sympathetic wife, get their two cute kids out of their tower-block home before it falls to fearsome other-worldly invaders?

Actually, *Extinction* isn't quite the extraterrestrial survival potboiler it first appears to be. It deftly throws a swerve that I certainly didn't see coming, and quickly becomes more than the sum of its parts. To reveal more would be to spoil the fun (and we don't want to do that), but the conceit works and elevates the film above the run-of-the-mill.

Directed by Ben Young, this streaming B-movie has chutzpah if not pace. While the budget betrays its ambitions (there are few things worse than unconvincing CGI explosions), costume design and physical effects are good enough. The show plays out like one of the *Future Shock* shorts from *2000AD*, and doesn't out-stay its welcome.

The movie is presented widescreen in 4K HDR. The cinematography is clean and sharp, although you wouldn't exactly hail this as a reference-quality experience. Meanwhile, the film's 5.1 soundmix is given plenty of opportunity to impress, with explosions and general mayhem, adding up to an immersive night in front of your TV. ***SM***

★★★☆☆





ANYWHERE CAN BE YOUR CINEMA

FROM STADIA, PARKS AND GARDENS TO CEMETERIES

THE NOMAD CINEMA

THE **ROAMING POP UP** THAT GIVES BACK

The Nomad Cinema offers bespoke indoor and outdoor screenings for both public and private parties in London and the surrounding area.

The Nomad Cinema covenants 100% of its profits to charity so by screening under the stars you are also helping to transform lives through film.

WWW.WHEREISTHENOMAD.COM

Collecting...

Dwayne Johnson

To celebrate the disc debut of The Rock's latest blockbuster *Rampage*, **Team HCC** rounds up 10 more must-own movies featuring the modern king of action cinema...

Fast & Furious 5

The petrol-head franchise shifted up a gear in 2011 to become the all-action, money-spinning juggernaut it remains today. And it's this fifth entry that also saw a massive injection of muscle and charisma when Johnson joined the cast as Security Service Agent Luke Hobbs, who quickly progresses from tracking Dominic Toretto's fugitives to helping them escape from crime lord Hernan Reyes. Johnson has remained part of the *F&F* 'family' ever since – and next year will star in spin-off movie *Hobbs and Shaw*.

Get it: Unlike parts 6, 7 and 8, this has not yet received a UHD Blu-ray release. The existing BD is excellent, however, with crisp 1080p images, a snarling DTS-HD 5.1 track and plenty of extras. We'd suggest avoiding any series boxsets until the supposed 10th and final film appears...





Pain & Gain

Michael Bay's gloriously gaudy deconstruction of the American Dream gave Johnson the chance to flex both his physical *and* comic muscles, playing one of a trio of body builders (alongside Mark Wahlberg and Anthony Mackie) who decide to make money by trying their hand at kidnapping and extortion. An utterly insane true crime film, and arguably Bay's best movie to date.

Get it: The UK BD is identical to the US Special Collector's Edition – and has received two different Zavvi-exclusive steelbooks.



Welcome to the Jungle

Released in the US as *The Rundown*, director Peter Berg's mid-budget 2003 film casts 'The Rock' as a bounty hunter sent to hunt down his boss's son (Sean William Scott) in Brazil. No matter what name you know it under, the film is a fun '80s throwback that cemented Johnson's place as a true action superstar.

Get it: A UK Blu-ray was released back in 2008, but appears to be out of print now.



San Andreas

Johnson's fire service chopper pilot provides the calming presence amidst the carnage in this big-budget 2015 earthquake disaster movie that elicits plenty of thrills despite teetering over the edge of believability pretty quickly. Ignore the bizarre Kylie Minogue cameo and focus on the destruction-filled set-pieces.

Get it: Both the 4K and Full HD Blu-ray releases feature a kitchen-sink-and-all Dolby Atmos soundmix. 3D fans will want the 1080p combi set.



The Scorpion King

Spinning out of *The Mummy Returns*, Chuck Russell's 2002 action-adventure flick charts the early adventures of Akkadian warrior Mathayus (Johnson) in the days before he became an evil half-scorpion CGI monstrosity. The result is a cheesy romp that comes off like a family-friendly version of Conan.

Get it: The uncut UK Blu-ray is available both by itself and as part of a four-film *Scorpion King* boxset that also includes the three (Rock-free) DTV sequels.





Faster

Not to be confused with the *F&F* series, this 2010 action/thriller finds Johnson playing an ex-con out for revenge on the people who set him up. Such a description doesn't quite do the movie justice, though – *Faster* is a surprisingly philosophical and twisty ride, with an excellent supporting cast including Billy Bob Thornton and Maggie Grace.

Get it: The UK BD offers fine AV quality and a few interesting extra bits.



Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle

This 2017 follow-up to the hit 1995 Robin Williams film gives the cursed boardgame concept a videogame update, while finding plenty of laughs in the bodyswap comedy that arises from having its young heroes occupy the archetypal avatars they have chosen to 'play' as. Inventive and a whole lot of fun, it's a terrific sequel that exceeds all expectations.

Get it: Sony Pictures' Ultra HD Blu-ray partners its knockout 4K visuals with an exclusive Dolby Atmos soundmix.



G.I. Joe: Retaliation

Whenever people talk about movie sequels that improve on their predecessors, they seem to forget about this toy-based blockbuster. Okay, so making a better film than *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra* wasn't asking much, and *...Retaliation* is still incredibly silly, but its combination of non-stop action and The Rock's charisma make it not only bearable but genuinely enjoyable.

Get it: Paramount has recently released the film on Ultra HD BD as half of the *G.I. Joe: Two-Movie Set*. Although that does mean you have to own the original, too.



The Other Guys

The Rock only appears in this 2010 comedy (and financial crash satire) in a brief, opening cameo – but what a cameo it is, sending up his action movie persona as a bone-headed cop who (along with partner Samuel L. Jackson), leaves a path of destruction across Manhattan, before meeting a surprise fate. 'Aim for the bushes...'.

Get it: Available on a bargain-priced single-disc Blu-ray from Sony Pictures, and loaded with (mostly lightweight) extra features. Also in 4K via Amazon Video (and possibly other streaming platforms).



The Rock voiced demigod Maui (above) in Disney's 2016 'toon

Moana

Johnson put his boundless charm and self-effacing comic chops to excellent effect as the voice of the legendary (not to mention vainglorious) Polynesian demigod Maui in Disney's Oscar-nominated smash hit 2016 computer-animated feature. While the story understandably belongs to the titular tribal chief's daughter (voiced by Auli'i Cravalho), Johnson repeatedly steals the screen in his supporting role – and gets the chance to show off his singing skills with the toe-tappingly good musical number *You're Welcome*.

Get it: Stunning stereoscopic visuals and delightful DTS-HD MA 7.1 sonics make the 3D Blu-ray the version you'll want to own.

Have we missed one of your favourite Dwayne Johnson movies? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Missed an issue?

Have you missed a copy of *Home Cinema Choice*? You can now order these online



Issue No.278



Issue No.279



Issue No.280



Issue No.281



Issue No.282



Issue No.283



Issue No.284



Issue No.285



Issue No.286



Issue No.287



Issue No.288



Issue No.289

Order Online: www.mags-uk.com

Please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of all issues displayed above.

AVTech media ltd

EISA
EXPERT IMAGING AND SOUND ASSOCIATION

EISA Awards 2018-2019







RUNNING FOR MORE than 30 years, the annual awards from the Expert Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) showcase the most desirable hardware around. While EISA's scope includes hi-fi, photography, mobile technology and in-car audio, the categories featured here are the selections of the Home Theatre Audio and Home Theatre Video groups, of which *Home Cinema Choice* is a member alongside specialist AV magazines from France, Germany, Australia, the US, Sweden, Spain, Italy and beyond. These awards (covering everything from home cinema subwoofers and Dolby Atmos speakers to premium 4K TVs and affordable Blu-ray players) are chosen after a lengthy judging process, during which member magazines get together and whittle down a shortlist. Nominated products can be considered the cream of the electronics crop...

EISA BEST BUY OLED TV 2018-2019

PHILIPS 55OLED803

Philips combines the latest 2018 OLED panel with its revised P5 picture engine for truly stunning results with this 55in model, while still hitting a tempting price. This UHD OLED TV lets you experience standard dynamic range content in near-HDR quality through Philips' latest innovation, 'Perfect Natural Reality'. Meanwhile, its rich, natural colours, true blacks and excellent motion sharpness – plus support for the latest HDR10+ standard – also make this an excellent choice for HDR material. Furthermore, Philips' unique Ambilight technology creates a striking visual addition to the onscreen experience while the powerful 50W sound system and Android TV with Google Assistant all add to an outstanding all-round TV.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY OLED TV
Philips 55OLED803

EISA PREMIUM PROJECTOR 2018-2019

SONY VPL-VW760ES

Sony adds to its home theatre projector lineup with this laser-illuminated native 4K HDR flagship that delivers an outstanding movie performance. Using SXRD panels filtered down from the company's digital cinema division, the VPL-VW760ES creates refined, super-sharp largescreen visuals, combined with an HDR10 and HLG delivery bolstered by the projector's skilful light-handling and 2000-Lumen brightness. A wide-colour presentation thanks to the laser, Reality Creation upscaling of Full HD sources and immersive 3D playback complete a package that's destined for the finest of home theatres. Finally, the curved chassis design, a 2.06x zoom and expansive throw ratio mean installation is painless. Simply put, this 4K projector is best-in-class.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
PREMIUM PROJECTOR
Sony VPL-VW760ES

EISA HOME THEATRE TV 2018-2019

PHILIPS 65OLED903

Home theatre enthusiasts demand a genuinely cinematic experience that marries immersive visuals with dynamic sound, and Philips' 65in OLED flagship delivers. A new, exclusive partnership with hi-fi specialists Bowers & Wilkins results in a bespoke in-built soundbar featuring dedicated midbass and treble drivers in isolated chambers, crafting a soundfield that's rich in detail and depth. Philips' powerful P5 engine with its new 'Perfect Natural Reality' image processing and extensive user calibration tweaks ensure superb UHD (and upscaled SDR) HDR pictures with deep black levels, fine shadow detail, outstanding contrast and a wide color gamut. Overall, the 65OLED903 offers a class-leading performance, topped off by Ambilight-enhanced atmosphere, which gets the best from Ultra HD Blu-ray and streamed sources.





EISA PREMIUM LCD TV 2018-2019

SAMSUNG 65Q9FN

The first thing you notice about Samsung's top-of-the-range QLED TV is its gorgeous design and discreet installation potential. Its 65in UHD display is freed from all cables except a single, sleek connection with the One Connect Box, which houses the electronics and inputs. Then, via Samsung's Ambient mode, the TV can display artwork, widgets or your own images while still in standby mode, and thanks to 'Smart Things' technology can also form part of a smart home ecosystem. Picture quality is even more impressive, with the 65Q9FN's use of Full Array Local Dimming (FALD) technology, driven by Samsung's Q-Engine image processing, resulting in images of breathtaking beauty. SDR and HDR content, including HDR10, HDR10+ and HLG, dazzles with its super-wide colour gamut, high brightness and deep blacks.

EISA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TV 2018-2019

LG 65SK9500

Artificial Intelligence is transforming the smart operations of televisions, and the SK9500 from LG leads from the front. Heading up LG's 2018 Super UHD range, it delivers a fine Ultra HD image (with Dolby Vision support) from IPS Nano-Cell technology with Full Array LED Dimming Pro, while adding a powerful artificial intelligence backbone called 'AI ThinQ' that combines with Google Assistant. This system works with existing Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa-enabled devices, making channel, input and other adjustments possible via voice command. The latest webOS platform and Magic Remote make navigating the TV's vast number of streaming apps a pleasure. This is an A.I. TV with excellent connections and intuitive features that are receptive to the individual user's needs.



EISA PREMIUM OLED TV 2018-2019

LG OLED65E8

With the 65in E8, LG has unleashed a superior and hugely versatile UHD HDR TV where stunning image quality is only part of the story. For example, smart interaction and video-on-demand via its excellent WebOS interface is further boosted by LG's ThinQ A.I. processing. Onboard Dolby Atmos decoding/playback brings extra sonic immersion, while the picture-on-glass design blends into any environment. As for its all-important picture performance, a new, brighter OLED panel design and Alpha 9 engine combine to deliver contrast-rich, wide-colour visuals. Dolby Vision material from disc and streaming platforms is supported, while HDR10 material is polished via LG's impressive image processing. This is a worthy winner in our premium OLED TV category.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
PREMIUM OLED TV
LG OLED65E8

EISA MONITOR INNOVATION 2018-2019

SHARP AQUOS LV-70X500E

8K isn't the future – it's already here. Featuring a native 7680x4320px display (16 times the resolution of Full HD), this 70in LCD monitor from panel manufacturer Sharp delivers a level of definition that has to be seen to be believed. Among its eight HDMI inputs, four are used in parallel to deliver an 8K video signal, and there are two USB ports supporting 8K still pictures. But there's no need to wait for such content – the LV-70X500E features powerful 8K upscaling technology and Full Array Local dimming for high-contrast and razor-sharp reproduction of your UHD HDR movie collection. This a stunning proposition from Sharp that heralds the dawn of a new era.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
MONITOR INNOVATION
Sharp Aquos LV-70X500E

EISA BEST BUY LCD TV 2018-2019

TCL 55DC760

TCL's midrange 55in UHD television has genuine all-round appeal, adding the new Android 8.0 operating system to a feature set that includes HDR playback and an integrated two-way JBL soundbar to give pictures a sonic boost. Its extended color gamut reaps rewards with sports, movies and games content, and a wide viewing angle helps it retain its high picture performance when watching off-axis.

The user interface provides options to adjust images to your personal taste, while Android TV integrates Chromecast and Google Assistant for slick control and access to your online content. The 55DC760 is a great value-for-money TV, particularly when you consider its roster of added features, elegant design and connectivity options.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY LCD TV
TCL 55DC760



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
PHOTO VIDEO CAMERA
Panasonic LUMIX DC-GH5S

EISA PHOTO VIDEO CAMERA 2018-2019

PANASONIC LUMIX DC-GH5S

This camera is specially designed for demanding videographers. The 10.2-megapixel Four Thirds sensor offers dual native ISO sensitivities for the best picture quality when working in low light. It also offers many different recording formats, including 4K/30p 4:2:2 10-bit direct to card without any time limit, or high frame rates (240fps in Full HD) for smooth slow motion. It also offers V-Log and HDR mode for wide dynamic range and better tonal rendering. Other useful facilities include a zebra pattern display, time code in/out function as well as a waveform and Vector Scope monitor.

EISA SLIM INSTALLATION COMPONENT 2018-2019

MOREL VIRTUS NANO INTEGRA 602 & SOUNDWALL POWERSLIM PMC600

Designed for easy installation where space is limited, this Morel Integra driver is used for both in-car audio and in-wall products under different names. Thanks to its limited depth, it can be installed in-wall using proper frames with almost no space behind as well as in shallow places in the car, as the mounting depth is a mere 0.67in (17mm). An 'Endumax' multilayer sandwich cone, with convex geometry, and 'Acuflex' soft dome with 2.1in and 1.1in voice coils, respectively, provide precision and control.

The speaker cleverly uses the same magnet for woofer and tweeter voice coil, which not only saves space but also provides an almost perfect phase alignment. This 'Zero-Point' dual-concentric technology assures that limited space need not affect the speaker's sonic prowess.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
SLIM INSTALLATION COMPONENT
Morel Virtus Nano Integra 602 & SoundWall PowerSlim PMC600

EISA BEST BUY PROJECTOR 2018-2019

BENQ W1700

The W1700 (HT2550 in the USA) from BenQ brings UHD HDR qualities to bigscreen projection in the home at a price which previously only delivered Full HD. BenQ's optical system leverages a DLP Digital Micromirror Device, in which the pixels of a Full HD array are shifted to four positions per frame, giving a UHD experience with crisp, bright and brilliant images. Colours are impressively accurate straight out of the box, and 3D playback is offered for that extra level of cinematic immersion. The compact cabinet makes the W1700 easy to install, while its onscreen menus are packed with tools and adjustments. As a way to upgrade to UHD projection, the W1700's combination of quality and value is irresistible.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY PROJECTOR
BenQ W1700

EISA HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM 2018-2019

KEF Q SERIES

KEF's Q Series has a legendary status stretching back decades, but has now been re-invented for today's user. A robust, stylish cabinet design is matched by an impressive performance bolstered by the latest version of KEF's Uni-Q concentric driver, where midrange and treble information is treated as a single source. For largescale bass delivery, an active driver is combined with two passive radiators in the Q750 floorstanders. These are joined by the Q650c centre and Q350 surround speakers to provide an accurate, wraparound soundstage with incredible neutrality. Extra bass depth comes via the Kube12b active subwoofer, while the Dolby Atmos-enabled Q50a upfiring speakers ensure that movie enthusiasts can enjoy up to 5.1.4 channels of unbeatable home cinema sound.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM
KEF Q Series

EISA HIGH-END UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER 2018-2019

PANASONIC DP-UB9000 SERIES

Panasonic adds to its illustrious Blu-ray history with the DP-UB9000 disc-spinner, a gloriously engineered high-end machine compatible with Ultra HD Blu-ray (including both Dolby Vision and HDR10+ grades), DVD, CD and hi-res audio – including DSD. Custom processing, high-spec components and advanced user adjustments mean every last drop of performance detail is squeezed from movies and music alike – Panasonic's user-adjustable HDR Optimiser tool improves the delivery of UHD HDR10 content, while a 768kHz/32-bit DAC serves up a premium stereo audio experience. And then there's the DP-UB9000's sumptuous design and build. Double-layer base and top plates, an aluminium chassis and a new, rigid drive mechanism ensure this master of Blu-ray is ready for action.





EISA BEST BUY UHD BLU-RAY PLAYER 2018-2019

SONY UBP-X700

From Sony's second generation of Ultra HD (4K) Blu-ray players, the UBP-X700 delivers everything you need to enter the new UHD HDR world without leaving the past behind, playing also DVDs, Blu-ray and even SACD. If needed, the second DMI output can send audio only, while the main output carries the video signal (including HDR10 and Dolby Vision) directly to a television. It offers a major bonus with its wireless networking abilities, able to access online video and audio services including Netflix and YouTube, plus high-res DLNA playback. Every 4K TV should have an Ultra HD Blu-ray player as a high-quality video source, and the X700's keen pricing makes it a high-value overachiever.



EISA SOUNDBAR 2018-2019

LG SK10Y

Designed to partner screens up to 65in and above, LG's SK10Y Dolby Atmos soundbar is a thrilling home theatre solution for when space is at a premium, and comes fully equipped with network functionality, hi-res audio compatibility, Chromecast and a wireless subwoofer. Slim and beautifully constructed, this 5.1.2-channel model features 4K HDR passthrough via its HDMI connectivity, and can be combined with LG's SPK8-S wireless speaker upgrade package to expand to a 7.1.2 soundfield. Audio performance, boosted by Meridian Audio technology and preset EQ modes, is rich in bass and huge in scale, with the in-built upfiring drivers adding impactful height-layer detail. It's a stunning home cinema sound from a well-featured package.



EISA HOME THEATRE IN-WALL SPEAKER 2018-2019

FOCAL 300IWLCR6 / 300IW6

For those that don't want speakers cluttering their room, Focal's 300 In-Wall series offers an elegant solution without compromising performance. Installation is made easy by the smart clamping mechanism, and the frameless magnetic grilles result in a near-invisible finish. Through their Flax drivers and glassfibre cones, these Focal in-wall speakers provide a neutral midrange, accurate bass and precise vocal definition, while clear and vibrant harmonics are delivered by the inverted dome tweeter – performance can adjusted via treble and midrange switches. With the three-way 300IWLCR6 speakers bringing impressive dynamics and low-frequency response to the front/centre soundstage, the smaller two-way 300IW6 is perfect for surround channel use. Simply cut a hole, click in and you're ready to go.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE IN-WALL SPEAKER
Focal 300IWLCR6 / 300IW6



EISA BEST BUY HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM 2018-2019

JAMO S 809 HCS / S 810 SUB / S 8 ATM

When it comes to captivating home theatre audio from a smart, stylish system, Jamo's Studio 8 series ticks all the boxes. An ideal starting point for a multichannel setup, the S 809 HCS package of two floorstanders, centre speaker and pair of bookshelf surrounds can be strengthened by the addition of the compact but powerful S 810 SUB for extra low-end grunt. Meanwhile, Jamo's S 8 ATM upfiring speakers, which integrate seamlessly with floorstanding models, provide a Dolby Atmos upgrade path. The performance here is accurate, well-balanced and enveloping, and the slim, elegant cabinets with grey fabric grilles result in 5.1.2 package that looks every bit as good as it sounds.

EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SYSTEM
Jamo S 809 HCS / S 810 SUB / S 8 ATM

EISA BEST BUY SOUNDBAR 2018-2019

POLK AUDIO MAGNIFI MAX

The MagniFi MAX soundbar packs a lot of functionality into its living-room friendly design. Dolby and DTS decoding are allied to Polk Audio's patented 'Stereo Dimensional Array' digital surround processing, giving an expansive performance to movies, TV and music playback, while voice adjust technology boosts dialogue delivery, making it easy to understand at all times. The additional subwoofer, which connects wirelessly, offers powerful and well-controlled bass. HDMI connectivity simplifies installation, and music streaming from your favorite apps is achieved over Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. And if that's not enough, you can even hook up a Google Assistant speaker to control music playback with voice commands. It's an excellent soundbar all-rounder.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
BEST BUY SOUNDBAR
Polk Audio MagniFi MAX



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE RECEIVER
Pioneer VSX-933

EISA HOME THEATRE RECEIVER 2018-2019

PIONEER VSX-933

In direct contrast to its reasonable price, Pioneer's seven-channel VSX-933 AV receiver comes with a suitably high-spec feature list, allowing it to operate as the centerpiece of a home theatre with up to 7.2 channels. Onboard decoding includes the object-based Dolby Atmos and DTS:X formats, while a bespoke 'reflex optimiser' is on hand to calibrate any upwards-firing speakers in even the most challenging rooms. The powerful and well-constructed VSX-933 adds to its movie playback credentials with wireless multiroom, hi-res audio support, streaming services including Tidal, Spotify and Deezer, plus Chromecast. Immersive sound quality is fine-tuned by Pioneer's MCACC auto-calibration system, ensuring this receiver delivers films and music to a far higher level than you might expect given the price.

EISA HOME THEATRE AMPLIFIER 2018-2019

DENON AVC-X8500H

Denon's flagship AV amplifier is perfect for those seeking the highest levels of home entertainment. Rated at 210W per channel with no fewer than 13 discrete amplifiers, it's potently powerful and capable of driving demanding speakers, delivering a dynamic performance regardless of whether you are running a 9.1.4 array, or 7.1.6 setup with six ceiling channels. Able to decode Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D movie soundmixes, as well as hi-res audio files up to 192kHz/24-bit, the AVC-X8500H also packs an extensive range of inputs plus networking/streaming functionality to offer borderless comfort. A heavyweight construction, immense power supply and Audyssey's top-tier MultEQ XT32 EQ/calibration suite help engineer its superb, cinematic sound. Standing clear of its rivals, it delivers the ultimate home theatre experience.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE AMPLIFIER
Denon AVC-X8500H

EISA HOME THEATRE SUBWOOFER 2018-2019

SVS SB-4000

When it comes to a bass performance you can feel as well as hear, the SB-4000 is in a class of its own. Borrowing technology from SVS's 16-Ultra reference-grade range, this breathtaking subwoofer is equipped with a 'Sledge' amplifier boasting a mighty 4000W peak delivery. Its long-throw, 13.5in driver – bolted inside a solid closed cabinet – is capable of unleashing pure dynamics even with the very lowest subsonic frequencies. SVS's advanced DSP offers impeccable room correction with full parametric equalisation, letting the SB-4000 provide pinpoint LFE precision from any location, while all its settings can be easily altered via remote control or smartphone app. Offering maximum SPL, massive slam and an incredible low-frequency extension, this sub will shake, rattle and roll your home theatre.



EISA AWARD Best Product 2018-2019
HOME THEATRE SUBWOOFER
SVS SB-4000

AND THE REST OF THE EISA AWARDS...

HI-FI



EISA ANALOGUE MUSIC SYSTEM 2018-2019
Pro-Ject Juke Box S2

EISA COMPACT MUSIC SYSTEM 2018-2019
Denon CEOL N10

EISA ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEM 2018-2019
Naim Audio Uniti Atom

EISA WIRELESS SYSTEM 2018-2019
DALI Callisto 6C & Sound Hub

EISA STEREO SYSTEM 2018-2019
Marantz ND8006/PM8006

EISA STEREO RECEIVER 2018-2019
Yamaha R-N803D

EISA AMPLIFIER 2018-2019
Primare I15 Prisma

EISA BEST BUY AMPLIFIER 2018-2019
Pioneer A-40AE

EISA HIGH-END AMPLIFIER 2018-2019
NAD M32

EISA STREAMER 2018-2019
Pro-Ject Stream Box S2 Ultra

EISA DAC 2018-2019
Chord Electronics Hugo 2

EISA TURNTABLE 2018-2019
Technics SL-1200GR

EISA LOUDSPEAKER 2018-2019
ELAC Adante AS-61

EISA BEST BUY LOUDSPEAKER 2018-2019
Q Acoustics 3050i

EISA SMART LOUDSPEAKER 2018-2019
Harman Kardon Citation 500

EISA HEADPHONE 2018-2019
Sennheiser HD 660 S

EISA HIGH-END HEADPHONE 2018-2019
Focal Clear

EISA HI-FI INNOVATION 2018-2019
Micromega M-One M-150

EISA PORTABLE DAC/HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER 2018-2019 *(Combined Award with Mobile Devices)*
iFi Audio xDSD

www.eisa.eu

PHOTOGRAPHY



EISA CAMERA OF THE YEAR 2018-2019
Sony α7 III

EISA PROFESSIONAL DSLR CAMERA 2018-2019
Nikon D850

EISA DSLR CAMERA 2018-2019
Canon EOS 6D Mark II

EISA BEST BUY CAMERA 2018-2019
Canon EOS M50

EISA SUPERZOOM CAMERA 2018-2019
Sony Cyber-shot RX10 IV

EISA MIRRORLESS CAMERA 2018-2019
Fujifilm X-H1

EISA PROFESSIONAL MIRRORLESS CAMERA 2018-2019
Sony α7R III

EISA DSLR ZOOM LENS 2018-2019
SIGMA 14-24mm F2.8 DG HSM | Art

EISA DSLR TELEZOOM LENS 2018-2019
Tamron 70-210mm F/4 Di VC USD

EISA DSLR PRIME LENS 2018-2019
Canon EF 85mm f/1.4L IS USM

EISA PROFESSIONAL LENS 2018-2019
Nikon AF-S NIKKOR 180-400mm f/4E TC1.4 FL ED VR

EISA MIRRORLESS WIDEANGLE ZOOM LENS 2018-2019
Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM

EISA MIRRORLESS STANDARD ZOOM LENS 2018-2019
Tamron 28-75mm F/2.8 Di III RXD

EISA MIRRORLESS TELEZOOM LENS 2018-2019
Sony FE 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 GM OSS

EISA PHOTO INNOVATION 2018-2019
Canon Speedlite 470EX-AI

EISA PHOTO SERVICE 2018-2019
CEWE Photobook Pure

EISA BEST SMARTPHONE 2018-2019 *(Combined Award with Mobile Devices)*
Huawei P20 Pro

MOBILE DEVICES



EISA CONSUMER SMARTPHONE 2018-2019
Nokia 7 Plus

EISA LIFESTYLE SMARTPHONE 2018-2019
Honor 10

EISA BEST BUY SMARTPHONE 2018-2019
NOA Element N10

EISA NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES 2018-2019
AKG N700NC

EISA MOBILE LOUDSPEAKER 2018-2019
JBL Xtreme 2

EISA WIRELESS IN-EAR HEADPHONES 2018-2019
JBL Endurance DIVE

EISA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LOUDSPEAKER 2018-2019
LG XBOOM AI ThinQ WK7 / LG ThinQ Speaker WK7 *(in the USA)*

EISA MOBILE AUDIO PLAYER 2018-2019
Pioneer XDP-02U

IN-CAR ELECTRONICS



EISA IN-CAR HEAD UNIT 2018-2019
Pioneer AVIC-Z910DAB

EISA IN-CAR HIGH-END COMPONENT 2018-2019
Audison TH K2 II A Coro

EISA IN-CAR SMART UPGRADE 2018-2019
Match UP 7BMW

EISA IN-CAR SUBWOOFER 2018-2019
Audison APBX 10 AS

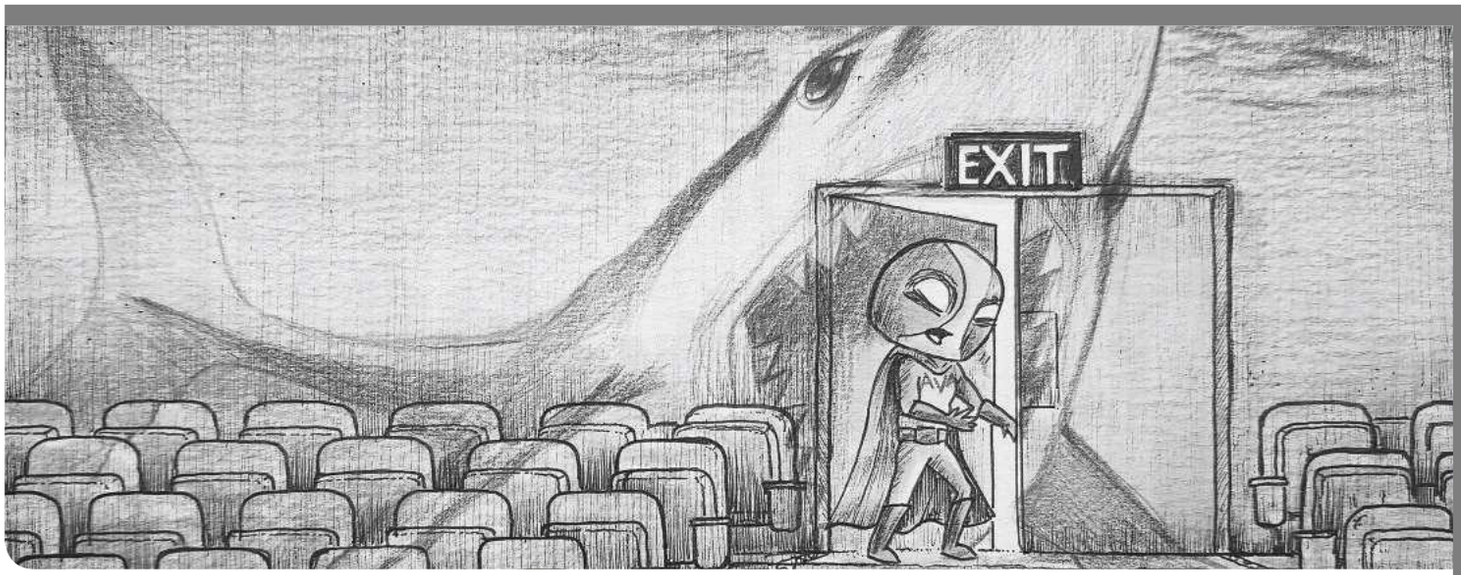
EISA IN-CAR PROCESSOR 2018-2019
Helix DSP MINI

EISA IN-CAR AMPLIFIER 2018-2019
Ground Zero GZPA 4SQ

EISA IN-CAR DSP AMPLIFIER 2018-2019
JL Audio VX800/8i

EISA IN-CAR INTEGRATION 2018-2019
Mosconi Gladen Pico 8|12 DSP

EISA IN-CAR INNOVATION 2018-2019
Gladen Aures



AV Avenger

A new premium cinema format uses multiple projectors and side walls to broaden your movie-going horizons. **Steve May** wonders if ScreenX has the X factor

I'M A SUCKER for extreme cinema. Bigger, louder, more immersive, I'm all for it.

I can (just about) remember being taken to see *Ice Station Zebra* as a kid in Cinerama in 1968, and was one of the first in line for *Captain EO*, the Michael Jackson multi-sensory sci-fi short, in the 1980s. Shown exclusively in Disney theme parks, *Captain EO* combined 3D with synchronised in-theatre laser effects and billowing smoke. It was the precursor to the 4DX screens and variants we know today.

Now there's a new novelty in town. ScreenX is a panoramic cinema format that surrounds you with 270-degree visuals (and similar to a rival technology briefly touted by Barco, called Escape, that never found commercial traction). Developed by CJ 4DPLEX, the same outfit behind 4DX, the technology is exclusive to Cineworld in the UK.

There are ScreenX theatres at London's Cineworld O2 and Liverpool's Cineworld Speke, with a third, Cineworld Leeds White Rose, imminent.

In some ways, ScreenX recalls Cinerama, which used a curved screen to create a 146-degree image. ScreenX adopts a modern boxy approach, surrounding patrons on three sides using three screens – the side walls, known as Wings, are finished in a fabric that matches the brightness and colour performance of the main screen. A battery of projectors use edge-blending tech to fill each wall with seamless video.

Obviously, you'll need a special ScreenX edition of a movie for this to work. Ideally, additional material is shot during the main production using specialist rigs. This is then post-produced and graded to match the main feature.

ScreenX movies are supplied to a theatre in two separate digital files: the main movie and 'wing' content. ScreenX software syncs the two, to create a single presentation. You'll pay a £3 premium for the privilege.

Water way to begin

Titles converted so far (and shown in its native South Korea) include *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* and *Black Panther*. For the ScreenX UK debut, Cineworld unleashed *The Meg*. I went along and had a whale of a time.

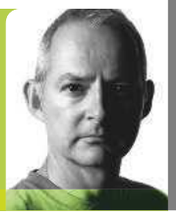
ScreenX works a little like Ambilight, albeit with live video rather than amorphous light. The wings fill your peripheral vision, creating a wraparound sensation; there's nothing particular to look at though. You're not constantly peering about, as you might do in VR.

The side walls are only used sparingly, to enhance certain sequences. They're not on all the time. When The Stath first dives in his dinky submersible, the sidewalls fill with water and bubbles. Similarly, when The Meg chomps on a hapless boat, the wings open up to show the expanse of surrounding ocean.

While obviously a novelty, **I found ScreenX to be a lot of fun. I'm not sure cinephiles would agree though**. For one thing, with upwards of five projectors in play, the auditorium is uncomfortably bright. Also, ScreenX at the O2 is one of those theatres with an exit door positioned close to the screen (so there's always a distracting green lamp in your field of vision). When the wings fire up, that exit door literally becomes an escape, Narnia-style, into the picture.

The challenge now, of course, is to bring it all home. I can't see anyone decking their home theatre with a trio of projector screens, but a multiscreen PC rig might be just the ticket... ■

Is ScreenX just another quirky fad?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com



Having seen ScreenX, **Steve May** is working on a four-wall, rumble seat, 32-channel cinema system that will be called Screen Why?

ILLUSTRATION: BY TEKURA MAEVA

JOE&Seph's
GOURMET POPCORN CHEF & CONNOISSEUR

20% OFF*



THE UK'S FIRST POPCORN SUBSCRIPTION HAS ARRIVED!

SIGN UP to receive **8 flavours** of award-winning, gourmet popcorn every month, as well as trying **our newest popcorn flavours** before anybody else!

HOW IT WORKS...

1

CHOOSE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

2

SELECT A DIFFERENT BOX EACH MONTH



3

WE DELIVER STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR

20% OFF YOUR FIRST BOX! USE EXCLUSIVE DISCOUNT CODE **CINEMA18** AT THE CHECKOUT

TO SIGN UP, PLEASE VISIT **JOEANDSEPHS.CO.UK/SUBSCRIBE**

*T+C's apply. 20% off your first box. Valid on all new rolling (buy for yourself) subscriptions only. Can't be used with any other offer. Valid until November 15th, 2018.

Sweet!

Introducing Cherry Cola—quite possibly the best Hybrid Electro-Optical HDMI cable on the market today. Utilizing newly developed and highly advanced electro-optical conversion modules, Cherry Cola reliably carries 18Gbps data packages, including 4K Ultra+HDR, for distances up to 30.5m—all without mirrors and external power supplies.



Of course, Cherry Cola is made with the same great care and advanced engineering that characterize every passive AudioQuest cable. Our sophisticated Noise-Dissipation System combines carefully applied layers of carbon to absorb radio-frequency noise and directionality-controlled silver-plated conductors to drain it away from where it would do the most harm.

The result is exceptional reliability and outstanding performance that's easy to hear. How sweet it is!

audioquest®